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Powerful Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Germany: A Comparison of the Two German Women Writers Sophie Von La Roche (Gutermann) and Dorothea Schlegel (Mendelssohn), Exploring their Upbringing, Marriages, Love, Literary Works, And Social Atmospheres

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POWERFUL WOMEN WRITERS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GERMANY:
A COMPARISON OF THE TWO GERMAN WOMEN WRITERS SOPHIE VON LA
ROCHE (GUTERMANN) AND DOROTHEA SCHLEGEL (MENDELSSOHN),
EXPLORING THEIR UPBRINGING, MARRIAGES, LOVE, LITERARY
WORKS, AND SOCIAL ATMOSPHERES, AND THE INFLUENCE
THEY EXERTED ON FUTURE GERMAN WOMEN WRITERS.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirement for the degree of
Master of Humanities

By

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B.A., Wright State University, 1988

2019

Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

April 5, 2019

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Miriam Ute Powers ENTITLED Powerful Women in Eighteenth Century Germany: A Comparison of the two women writers Sophie von La Roche (Gutermann) and Dorothea Schlegel (Mendelssohn), exploring their upbringing, marriages, love, literary works and social atmospheres, and the influences they exerted on future German women writers BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities

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ABSTRACT

Powers, Miriam Ute. M.Hum., Master of Humanities Graduate Program, Wright State University, 2019. Powerful Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Germany: A Comparison of the Two German Women Writers Sophie Von La Roche (Gutermann) and Dorothea Schlegel (Mendelssohn), Exploring their Upbringing, Marriages, Love, Literary Works, And Social Atmospheres, and the Influence they Exerted on Future German Women Writers.

This thesis explores the status of German women writers in the 18th century during the era of Enlightenment and Romanticism. I will examine the philosophical ideas and beliefs during these times, and the impact these ideas had on La Roche and Schlegel specifically, as well as society as a whole. While studying the life style, upbringing, and the most important literary works of the two women writers, I will show the advancements made by them towards greater autonomy for other women writers emphasizing their courage, alongside the hardship they often endured. Seeking greater recognition and freedom from male tutelage, La Roche and Schlegel took their destiny into their own hands, yet often retained, and even chose their traditional roles in life over a complete need to change their status. The question if these courageous women actually achieved advancement for future women writers is explored in detail.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Information on the historic status of women writers in the 18th century

Die Frauen lebten lange, ohne zu schreiben,

dann begannen sie zu schreiben...

mit ihrem Leben und um ihr Leben.

(Christa Wolf, ed. Karoline von Günderrode: Der Schatten eines Traumes, 1981, page 5)

Women lived for a long time without writing;

then they began to write...

with their lives and for their lives (my translation)

This quote by Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806), a German Romantic poet, expresses the strong desire for literary emancipation, and the harsh price and consequences women often faced making any advancement in order to gain more personal freedom, as well as freedom in writing (Catling 1). Karoline von Günderrode's works were first discovered by German and American feminist critics in the 1970s and

1980s. She suffered from numerous illnesses all of her life, including an undiagnosed case of tuberculosis, and she eventually stabbed herself to death in 1806 (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 180). Günderrode was passionately engaged in contemporary, feminist, and intellectual women's issues, often "overstepping the boundaries of her sex" (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 184). This woman writer, who published a short story in one of Sophie von La Roche's journals, tried to escape a harsh poverty-stricken life and sought to find utopia in her poetic works. Her desire was to express the „Begierden wie ein Mann, ohne Männerkraft," meaning having desires like a man, without the power and strength of a man (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 181). Günderrode felt trapped in the body of a woman who sought to overcome the boundaries society placed on women. In her words, it was a "struggle of the soul." Just like Günderrode, seeking to enhance her place in history as a writer and rejecting the traditional female role, both La Roche and Schlegel set out to change women's lives in the eighteenth century by improving the education for girls and women, and therefore creating a lifestyle of higher quality.

Both of the women that I am introducing in my thesis, Sophie von La Roche and Dorothea Schlegel, took hold of their own destiny during a time when restrictive gender roles stood in the way of fulfilling many women writers' aspirations and dreams. Among those well-known German women in literature were Luise Gottsched, Rahel Varnhagen, Sophie Mereau, Bettine von Arnim, Meta Klopstock and several others. In their letters they exposed how they each dealt with situations that were considered outside the social norm regarding female behavior in the 18th century. Topics such as childless marriages, divorce, remarriage, extramarital affairs, writing their own

literature, and engagement in charitable causes were taboo and against the social rules of the time. I will show how these women overcame many of these obstacles by forming strong friendships, attempting to surpass the barriers of gender, history, and culture. Their true feminine duties, such as childbearing and child rearing, housekeeping, and taking care of their husbands were considered their true identities which stayed with them throughout their lives (French 73). Only once their child bearing years came to an end, could they even consider starting to pursue other goals they had, such as writing literature. This can be seen in Schlegel's comment to his friend Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1798, „Nun, sage ich, kann sie tun, was wir alle wollen - einen Roman schreiben. Mit der Weiblichkeit ist es nun doch vorbei...“[Now, I say, she can do what we all want - write a novel. But it's all over with femininity] (French 73). The German writer Novalis (Werke 2:161) regarded women simply as uneducated beings, calling them „der sogenannte ungebildete Theil“ (the so-called uneducated part) in comparison to men, something in his view women could never overcome. Other writers, such as Eichendorff and Gutzkow, took it even further and believed that women as a whole could never attain entrance into the literary world due to their lack in intellectual creation (French 73). It was inconceivable for many men that women could do both: be feminine and write all at the same time.

2. Enlightenment and Romanticism

To better understand the changes that were happening during the eighteenth century in society as a whole, it is important to explain the foundation that society was based on during both the periods of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Gender roles were still clearly defined in society and generally adhered to without much questioning,

and it was exactly this idea that people were starting to redefine. The historic time of the eighteenth century between 1720 and 1785 is known as the Enlightenment period in literature and philosophy, and it is a time when people were starting to reject and question the previously held traditional and social ideas. A greater tolerance towards religious freedom was now encouraged and practiced, and a strong emphasis was placed on human reasoning and individualism. This tolerance was displayed by people from different religious and social classes coming together and forming new symbolic families (Wucherpennig 74). Known philosophers such as Rousseau, Locke, Descartes, Kant, Voltaire and others accepted these new ideas as truths. Nothing was to be taken as foregone conclusions, but human beings were supposed to doubt and question everything and find their own meaning and truth in life. It was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a modern thinker who believed in traditional ideas going hand in hand with an emancipated and enlightened life. He coined the famous German phrase „Habe den Mut dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen.“ This can be translated as a call to summon up your courage to use your own intellectual reasoning power and to put trust in your own thinking and rationalizing capabilities. The full version of his famous saying, quoted from *Political Writings* reads „Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschliessung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen“ (translated from Kant's *Political Writings* as "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the

inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another").

To summarize, the most important intellectual movement during this time period was the focus on *Vernunft* (reason) and individualism (Wuchterpfennig 58). Human sympathy, patriotic societies and togetherness among friends of both genders were held in high regard. God was still the sole creator of the world but now no longer oversaw the future direction of humanity. God's work is shown in the beauty of nature. Each human being possesses natural reason, and each one should use this reasoning power to advance and nurture harmony among mankind (Wuchterpfennig 77). After the French Revolution ended in 1799, an era in Germany began that we now call Romanticism, and this period focused on feelings and emotions versus the emphasis placed on reason, stemming from the Enlightenment period (Rötzer 128). People were living life in harmony on earth, and no longer only looked towards heaven for religion and the afterlife. Life on earth and heaven were beginning to melt together. Love among all people and animals in nature, was in the forefront and guided a harmonious family life. Romanticism was a form of art and literature emphasizing emotions and imagination and poeticizing the world as a whole. Life was being romanticized in every possible form, and the focus in terms of religious belief was inhabiting the here and now, compared to the days of „Diesseits und Jenseits“ (transl. here/earth and there/heaven) (Rötzer 126-129). It was this world into which both Sophie von La Roche and Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit Schlegel, thirty years later, were born.

During these new and often confusing times, both Sophie von La Roche and Dorothea Schlegel were walking a fine line between abiding by the boundaries of an ideal woman with all its societal constraints, and breaking free to become the emancipated women liberated from male domination that they so desperately were seeking to be. La Roche was writing in a style that was as progressive as it was accommodating. Perhaps she was not as interested in the actual status of women in society, as she was in the betterment of education available to them. This can be considered a paradox, as these ideas seem to contradict themselves. Sophie von La Roche's novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (*Lady Sternheim*) promotes a very conservative, ideal image of the woman, yet tries to educate the young women and girls to break out, educate themselves, and act progressively (Arons 54). La Roche embodies the ideas of philosopher Kant when she lives an unconventional, even progressive life but holds on to her traditional religion and culture. According to Kant, it is most important to have the freedom to choose your own life style, and that in itself provides you with ultimate autonomy, regardless of your true beliefs. Dorothea Schlegel's beliefs were also complex; many scholars recognized her as an emancipated and progressive woman. Yet, in the end, Schlegel displayed many traditional values herself, and I believe that she reverted back to seeing women playing more traditional roles in society. Just like La Roche, Schlegel took big steps forward in claiming new rights and long-needed recognition for women, but was not able or willing to leave behind the traditional beliefs ingrained by her upbringing.

The Romantic writers and philosophers, among them philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), were starting to blur gender lines and found that „Nur

selbständige Weiblichkeit, nur sanfte Männlichkeit ist gut und schön” (translation mine, only autonomous femininity, only gentle masculinity is good and beautiful). In theory, these ideas seemed right to Friedrich Schlegel and like-minded scholars, but in practice complete equality between the sexes was not achieved and would be debated for decades to come (Catling 69). These obstacles were not only found in literature but were ingrained in legal, economic, financial, political, cultural, and educational matters. “The married woman was effectively a non-person, and although divorce was possible, particularly in Protestant Prussia, the female divorcee was virtually a pariah, while Luther’s teaching on marriage had made single woman an anomaly” (Catling 69). Employment opportunities were restricted for ‘respectable’ women to the fields of teacher, actress or governess. Other sources of income were limited to some writing, often poetry, or sewing and embroidery, and there were very few opportunities for women to hold gainful employment. Added to this plight for women was the scarce education available to them. Catling states that being a good wife and mother was the most important job a woman could hold during these times, and any “abstract, analytical and scientific subjects were regarded as unsuitable for the female mind, and systematic study of any kind by women was rare” (70). To be called a learned woman was often met with ridicule and great criticism. The promise of newly achieved freedom for women after the Enlightenment and French Revolution remained incomplete, and strictly observed gender roles played a significant part of this phenomenon (Catling 68).

„Schreibende Frauen sind keine Erfindung der Neuzeit” (translation mine ...women writers are no invention of our time), and there have always been educated women who composed written works. Their numbers, however, were still few.

Eventually women writers such as Sophie von La Roche published a great many books, which shows us an astonishing presence of female writers of varying writing levels and genres, and it just cannot be claimed that women writers only existed “in the shadow of Olympus,” or entering the literary market „durch die Hintertür”, translation mine, through the back door (Fronius 3). And women were not active in journalism, as they were lacking the proper education. Another reason was failure of acceptance of women into fields dominated by men since society in general still saw women as working only in the household, a natural task of women. Women writers had to be content if they could find a publisher willing to issue their works, let alone being compensated for those. Only as improvement in the education of girls advanced did we see women in journalism. Most of their works dealt with works about morality in advice columns and book reviews. By no means could this have been considered political journalism. It was only the beginning for women becoming accepted into the field of journalism. It wasn't until the middle of the 19th century that women dared to publish their own political articles. And they often did so under a pseudonym, but it was considered the beginning of political journalism by women (Brunold-Knop).

In summary, the promise of the French Revolution (1789-1799) remained unfulfilled for women. Even though women were very active during the Revolution seeking greater rights, especially regarding the education of women, women fell short in achieving these goals. Current debates concerning gender roles often lead back to this time when French, English and German writers debated the roles of women with differing viewpoints and outcomes. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the*

Rights of Woman was published in England, when at the same time Theodor von Hippel wrote an essay entitled *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (*On improving the status of women*), and French dramatist Olympe de Gouges published *Declaration des droits de la femme* (*Declaration of Rights for Women*). *The Declaration of Rights for Women* was written as a direct response to the previously written *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which was written in 1789. All three writers, Wollstonecraft, von Hippel and Gouges referred back to the Enlightenment period for their principles, but all of them failed in having their demands met; in fact, de Gouges was put to death by guillotine, Wollstonecraft was reviled and Hippel's work was assumed shortly after by Schiller, Humboldt and Friedrich Schlegel. The essays collected and written by Hippel were not dealing with women's rights but rather focused on gender characteristics (Catling 68).

According to author Kay Goodman, German feminists trace the beginning of women's literature to the era of Romanticism in the 18th century, starting at around 1800. These women writers focused on letter writing and did not actually agree with most of the radical ideas of the time but still were attracted to them, and felt the need to identify with these new ways of thinking (123). Women, such as La Roche and Schlegel rejected the constraints laid upon them and rebelled in various ways, laying the groundwork for future generations of so-called feminists who set out to express their ideas and thoughts using their newly found confidence in their own intelligence and abilities. Christa Wolf, a literary critic and novelist from the former East Germany, finds great agreement with these early women writers and "expressed profound sympathy" for these women (Goodman 124). At the same time, the English author

Mary Wollstonecraft fought for women's rights, voicing these same ideas to further the agenda of women's liberation from male domination (Catling 124).

In his article "Eighteenth-Century German Opinions about Education of Women", Peter Petschauer speaks about Dorothea Christine Erxleben Leporin (1715-1762), Germany's first female physician, who challenged the prevalent ideas of women being capable only of being wives, mothers, and caretakers of the home, an idea that was still firmly ingrained in the minds of many people in the eighteenth century, mostly in the minds of men. Leporin called on women to stand up and free themselves of such sexist domination (Petschauer 262). Her courage goes hand in hand with the thoughts and dreams portrayed in Sophie von La Roche and Dorothea Schlegel's lives. Both women showed their capabilities for living independently within the constrictions of their homes or in the outside world. In the 18th century, women were widely seen as housewives and mothers, and through education and a lot of courage, both La Roche and Schlegel tried to change the status of women, even if it accounted only to gradual or nominal change alongside many setbacks (Petschauer 265).

II. SOPHIE VON LA ROCHE

Attaining autonomy and moving closer to self-reliance was of utmost importance to Sophie von La Roche. Few women had more influence on German literature that was written for women and by women than La Roche. As a pioneering novelist she started the process of emancipation for women in the eighteenth century, and La Roche is widely considered the first woman novelist of Germany who was also financially independent.

1. Background and biography

Sophie Gutermann was born as the oldest child in 1730 in Kaufbeuren, Germany, into the „Hörmann-Haus”: the house of her father Georg Friedrich Gutermann and her mother Regina Barbara Gutermann. It was the time of Enlightenment, a time of very strict rules governing the upbringing of sons and daughters. Higher education at this time was reserved only for the male offspring in families. La Roche's father, however, allowed for young Sophie to have an extraordinary education, especially for a daughter in a religious household. Gutermann subscribed to the ideological ideas of Pietism, taught his daughter about his strong faith, and instilled these same ideas of pietism in her (Strohmeyr 20). According to Gutermann's and other Pietists' ideologies, virtue would always lead to a happy ending with God's help in spite of whatever setbacks might occur. As Wucherpfennig explains, Pietism is a religious movement starting in the seventeenth century that focused on brotherly love among all people. It is the heart that guides people under the watchful eye of Christ, and not so much the intellectual idea of reason (60). At a young age, Sophie Gutermann was already labelled a „Wunderkind”, a

wonder child, as she could read at the age of three, and finished reading the entire bible by the time she was five years old. Her father made her the unofficial „Bibliothekar“ (translation mine, librarian) at his gathering of scholars and friends at his house. Gutermann's close friend, the theologian and philosophical historian Jakob Brucker attended these meetings at the time, and asked to further young La Roche's education himself (Scherbacher-Posé 26). La Roche's father eventually ended these lessons by his friend, rejecting these „hochfliegenden, weiblichen Ambitionen“, these high-flown female ambitions. Scherbacher describes how La Roche begged on her knees to continue these lessons, „Ich bat meinen Vater auf Knien um Einwilligung, aber er wollte nicht“, but he would not give in to those requests. Years later, La Roche remarked that this was the reason why she never fully realized her dream of producing her „grosses Ganzes“, her big piece of work (Scherbacher-Posé 26). La Roche studied history, astronomy and French, along with taking piano lessons. Family friend Deacon Johann Jakob Brucker eventually took her under his wing, and introduced her to many different lessons, and particularly history. Father Gutermann drew the line when La Roche wanted to learn Latin. This type of education was considered too masculine, and he wanted to assure that his beloved daughter would attract an acceptable suitor. It was the father's task to obtain good suitors for his daughters and in no way did he want to diminish her chances. Of course, more than anything else, it was important for the girls of this time period to become sufficiently groomed to become proper wives, mothers, and companions to their future husbands. This was the time when La Roche was first exposed to literature, which would last throughout her entire life. It is important to include that she also received all the necessary training and instructions needed to

become a good future wife and mother, and would therefore be equipped to lead a perfect household. She learned to cook and perform all the motherly household chores alongside her intellectual education. It was La Roche's mother who passed on to her the love for poetry, and introduced her to the poetry collection of Barthold Heinrich Brockes, which proved to be of lasting influence on young La Roche (Strohmeyr 20). In his book, Strohmeyr further writes about La Roche's craving for knowledge while begging for more education from Jakob Brucker. The poetry collection „Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott“ (translation mine, earthly pleasure in God) by Barthold Heinrich Brockes opened up a new world of emotions and enthusiasm for La Roche. As described in Brockes' work, God's almost realistic representation of nature was the impetus for Sophie von La Roche's interest in sentimentality and writing (Strohmeyr 20). Since the education for girls at this time was somewhat limited, it took some time before Sophie could persuade her father to allow for more lessons with the family friend (Strohmeyr 22). It was much later on in her life when Sophie von La Roche admitted that the heroine of her novel *Lady Sternheim*, namesake Sophia, was actually a self-portrait, and she describes the heroine Sophia in great detail, modelling her after her own characteristics and physical features as shown in the next paragraph:

Strohmeyr describes Sophie von La Roche using these words:

„Sie war etwas über die mittlere Größe; vortrefflich gewachsen; ein länglich Gesicht voll Seele; schöne braune Augen voll Geist und Güte, einen schönen Mund, schöne Zähne. Die Stirn hoch, und, um schön zu sein, etwas zu groß, und doch konnte man sie in ihrem Gesichte nicht anders wünschen. Es war so viel Anmut in allen ihren Zügen, so viel Edles in ihren Gebärden, daß sie, wo sie nur erschien, alle Blicke auf sich

zog. Jede Kleidung ließ ihr schön, und ich hörte Mylord Seymore sagen, daß in jeder Falte eine eigne Grazie ihren Wohnplatz hätte. Die Schönheit ihrer lichtbraunen Haare, welche bis auf die Erde reichten, konnte nicht übertroffen werden. Ihre Stimme war einnehmend, ihre Ausdrücke fein, ohne gesucht zu scheinen. Kurz, ihr Geist und Charakter waren, was ihr ein unnachahmlich edles und sanftreizendes Wesen gab” (23).

To broadly summarize, young La Roche was described as possessing average height with a soulful face, beautiful, brown eyes full of spirit and benevolence, simply a being that drew all eyes upon her. All her garments made her look beautiful, and Lord Seymour said of look-alike heroine Sophia from her first novel that every fold of her clothing was inhabited by sheer grace. The beauty of her long, light brown hair could not be surpassed. Her voice was lovely, her expressions dignified, all in all, her spirit and character radiated of noble and charming essence.

It is easy to see how the character traits and outside appearance of Sophie von La Roche and her heroine Sophia from her novel *Lady Sternheim* seem to melt into one and the same person. It is evident that La Roche became Sophia in the novel, and this was another way for La Roche to seek acceptance and show her own emotions and beliefs to her readership.

Love and Marriages:

La Roche became the best dancer, studied French, became skilled in the drawing of flowers, crocheting, playing the piano, and taking care of the kitchen and the entire household. Because a formal education was denied to her, she had to further her didactical education on her own. At the age of fifteen, Sophie was introduced to the

Augsburg Society, where she was supposed to attain an appropriate suitor. Sophie was pretty, charming and a good dancer, and soon she met an admirer who she liked immediately: it was Giovanni Lodovico Bianconi (1717-1781), the Catholic physician of the Prince-Bishop of Augsburg. She fell in love and became engaged to the older, Italian physician, but only her mother was pleased with this union. Bianconi started to educate Sophie Gutermann in math as well as Italian, and wielded an important educational influence over the young woman. Regina Gutermann, La Roche's mother, died soon after, and the father kept postponing any wedding plans that he did not approve of, due to his own religious intolerance of Catholics. He demanded of his daughter Sophie that any female children stemming from this potential marriage would be baptized in the protestant faith. The Italian groom showed resistance, and Herr Gutermann thereafter pressured Sophie to flee this unacceptable situation, which the heartbroken Sophie vehemently rejected. After Bianconi insisted that his love Sophie would leave her parental home together with him, it became clear that Sophie was not willing to go against the will of her father because she could not disappoint him, as seen in her words, „Ich versagte es...weil ich meinen Vater nicht betrüben, nicht ohne seinen Segen aus seinem Hause wollte (Strohmeyr 30).” All these years she was told that in a woman's life, duty always stood above personal dreams and goals, and obedience over free will, as can be read in the following quotation: „Ihr ist all die Jahre eingetrichtert worden, dass im Leben einer Frau die Pflicht der Neigung zu stehen hat, der Gehorsam über dem freien Willen. Sie hat das verinnerlicht, Ungehorsam käme ihr wie eine Todsünde vor (Strohmeyr 30).” Her father forced Sophie Gutermann to dissolve the

engagement and subsequently sent nineteen-year old Sophie to the city of Biberach to family relatives, the family of Thomas Adam Wieland.

Relationship with Christoph Wieland:

It was at this time that Sophie Gutermann first met her seventeen year old cousin Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813). Wieland, the poet, writer, and translator is well known today for his important contribution to German literature. As a young man with a devoutly pietistic affiliation, he became known as a founding member of the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, most notably the novel *Agathon*. His erotic attraction to young Sophie and concurrent poetic teachings and literary requests of her created another dilemma and more conflicts for Sophie, which would endure throughout her entire life (Scherbacher-Posé 26). Wieland turned Sophie Gutermann, who was still mourning the loss of Bianconi, into his muse. The hurried engagement soon dissolved, and later in life famous writer Wieland wrote to the aged poet Sophie von La Roche that „Nichts ist wol gewisser, als daß ich, wofern uns das Schicksal nicht im Jahre 1750 zusammengebracht hätte, kein Dichter geworden wär (Strohmeyr 60).” Wieland credited La Roche for becoming a successful poet, insisting that had it not been for their fateful meeting, he would never have become a renowned poet himself. He praised La Roche for being his inspiration. According to Becker-Cantarino, the gendered literary exchange between La Roche and Wieland set an example for this era; the writer Becker-Cantarino analyzes La Roche’s and Wieland’s personal and professional relationships, and in her opinion Wieland gained not only respect by mentoring and publishing La Roche’s works, but their relationship also led to financial gain for him. It could be said that his interest did

not lie in her as a person but rather in his new access to the growing market of *Frauenliteratur*. The older La Roche became, the less Wieland paid attention to her personally or her works. He was more interested in the access to growing new literary markets that he gained from the recognition of her works (Prickett 640). Still, after the pair dissolved their short engagement, their love and affection for each other endured throughout all of their lives.

Marriage to Frank von La Roche:

In 1753, Sophie Gutermann married the Catholic civil servant Georg Michael Frank von La Roche. He was the thirteenth child of a poor surgeon, and presumably the illegitimate child of Count Stadion himself, which is how he acquired the noble surname von La Roche. At the time, Frank von La Roche was the private secretary of Count Friedrich von Stadion, and he eventually enjoyed an even greater career as the secret council to Prince Clemens Wenzeslaus of Trier. It was through this marriage that Sophie Gutermann entered the life of nobility. She valued her new husband, whom she had known from her days in Augsburg, yet she immediately revealed to him that she could not forget either Bianconi or Wieland (Strohmeyr 92). Both previous relationships ended due to the disapproval of Sophie's father, whose strict pietist rules she could not and would not oppose. In her father's eyes, La Roche took on the role of her mother after she had passed away. She wore her mother's clothes, and tried to be like her in every possible way to please her grieving father. This undeniably shows her unwillingness to rebel against the rules that her father, as well as society placed on her.

The German Pietist movement was going strong and much emphasis was placed on highly moral, pietist behavior-- a life of “introspection and self-examination.” At the court of Count Stadion, La Roche turned into a *Renommierfrau*, a woman of grace, of respect and honor, and highly sought after to have by any nobleman’s side. She played the part of the perfect salon hostess at the court, and was surrounded by scholars, books, newspapers and journals (Brown 474). The form of letter writing is an example of this type of women’s writing in the eighteenth century (Catling 62). Sophie von La Roche herself did not start writing until all of her children left her home, during which time she now enjoyed a considerable amount of free time, away from domestic chores, due to her higher class ranking in society. At first, La Roche turned to writing for amusement and pleasure only. Her new husband was accepting of this fact when the two of them started a happy marriage at the time when Sophie von La Roche was 23 years old. Even though the marriage seemed to lack love according to La Roche’s own accord, it produced eight children, five of which survived their early childhood years (Maurer, Doris 6). La Roche was already interested in the education of girls before she got married and had girls of her own, and it caused her great distress to see her own girls being sent to a boarding school at a monastery to be properly educated, as society demanded of women (Strohmeyr 110). Consequently, La Roche was plunged into a state of great depression. To fight this dark and heartbreaking feeling, she took up writing, claiming that her imagination from embarrassment helped her in creating the story to *Lady Sternheim*. In her grief of not being able to mother her own children, she penned these words „Ich wollte nun einmal ein papiernes Mädchen erziehen, weil ich meine eigenen nicht hier hatte, und da half mir meine Einbildungskraft aus der Verlegenheit und schuf den Plan

zu Sophiens Geschichte...” (Maurer, Doris 7), and out of this personal misery she created one of the most successful novels of the 18th century. Even now, La Roche could not stand firm against the orders of her husband, and immediately felt the tremendous pain of losing her daughters. This God given order and the structure of society were never challenged by La Roche, even though her thinking regarding the education of girls, and specifically her own daughters, caused her immense grief and sorrow. She wanted to educate her daughters in her own surroundings, yet she could not overcome her dutiful upbringing. Rebelling against societal norms was out of the question for her, and was never considered at all. She was progressive in her thinking but not quite revolutionary, and that alone showed her deep contradictions and confused feelings (Langner 40). La Roche saw herself in a self-critical way when she declared her own knowledge and the traditional role of „einer guten Mutter und Hauswirtin” as the cause of a fulfilled and peaceful life. La Roche regretted not having been able to attain a more formal education but at the same time greatly valued her advanced knowledge for a woman. She felt confident talking with her sons about topics normally reserved for men, and saw this as some type of balance of the sexes in her life (Langner 92). She enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere in the castle in the midst of an enlightened circle of friends where she could develop her own reason, soul and mind. At the time, the castle housed an extensive library counting around 1400 books. La Roche, as *Gesellschafterin* (translation mine, lady’s companion) of the estate, took care of all the correspondences in French, as it was customary at that time. Together with her husband, who was now holding a high office in the estate, La Roche often accompanied Count Stadion to his rural retreat in Bönningheim. It is during this time, that Sophie von La

Roche began writing her successful novel *Lady Sternheim* (*Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*).

2. Leading up to La Roche's first novel

Throughout the years, La Roche stayed in close contact with her old friend Wieland, who, even after their broken off engagement, remained her literary advisor. During this time, Wieland received a professorship in Erfurt, and consequently moved there. At this time Sophie von La Roche was also supported by Pastor Johann Jakob Brechter (1734-1772), a writer of literary works containing educational materials. He advised her to finish her novel in *Schloss Warthausen*. The novel was received very well, and even found recognition in distant lands. It was subsequently translated into Russian, Dutch, French and English. Goethe commented about her novel: „...*das ist kein Buch, das ist eine Menschenseele*,” which can be translated as... this is not a novel but rather a human soul. Goethe disagreed with Wieland on several points, and it was from this point forward, that La Roche “became identified with her own heroine, rather than being recognized for her contribution to the epistolary novel as a literary genre usually identified with Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe” (Munns and Richards 155). Langner claims that as La Roche was writing her novel, the first of its kind in Germany, „die Erziehung ihres *papiernen* Mädchens ist Sophie am Wichtigsten, da sie ihre eigenen nicht um sich hat,” explaining that it gave her greatest pleasure and personal relief to write about the education of a girl on paper, since she was not allowed to raise her own. She accepted guidance as well as corrections for her novel by Wieland; his advice mostly focused on stylistic matters of her writing, and not so much on the

sensitive nature of her thinking and writing style (24). According to Wieland, La Roche encountered difficulties expressing her feelings and thoughts in the German language, as she was more used to communicating in French at the time. Even though La Roche grew up in Germany in a rural area in the South, Wieland constantly criticized her knowledge of the German language and writing style, and ultimately encouraged Sophie von La Roche to publish her novel anonymously in 1771. Eventually, he even found a suitable publisher for the novel. Wieland also pressured her to write her first novel in the German language, and she continued to rely on his expertise for quite some time in the future. However, she was not willing to completely change her writing style if it meant compromising her beliefs or those of her various characters. She modeled her heroine after her own ideals, character and educational beliefs, and over time gained more confidence in herself. She would not change her way of thinking to please Wieland (Langner 26). Wieland did not always agree with La Roche's sensitive (*empfindsam*) writing style, but she often accepted his critique and assessment. Langner quotes La Roche when she announced, "c'est lui qui est juge competent," saying it is he, who is the most knowledgeable judge (25). All along Wieland supported the publication of the novel, and not only because it would do a great service to women writers, but also because it was very beneficial to him. He insisted that La Roche was having difficulties expressing her thoughts in German, and urged her to start their correspondences via letters written in German to improve her language skills. This exemplified the enormous influence Wieland exerted over La Roche, especially since the finished product of *Lady Sternheim* (*Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* with the subtitle *Von einer Freundin derselben aus Original-Papieren und anderen zuverlässigen Quellen*

gezogen) was entirely written in German (Langner 26). Wieland, who knew Sophie the best, was the toughest critic of her writing style, stating that „aber wenn ich Sie [...]um etwas bitten dürfte, so war’ es, künftig etwas mehr Zeit und Nachdenken auf Komposition und Styl zu wenden, und zu solchem Ende das, was Sie in der Wärme der ersten Conzeption aufs Papier geworfen haben, öfters bei kaltem Blute und mit kritischer Strenge zu überlesen. Vielleicht ist es Ihnen nicht mehr möglich sich diese eilfertige Manier abzugewöhnen” (Scherbacher-Posé 45). To summarize Wieland’s comment, after the publication of La Roche’s enormously successful novel *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, he urged Sophie von La Roche in his letter to take better care in her selection of composition and style, and to reign in her warm and sensitive writing style, using a keen and critical mind. Over time, La Roche gained mastery over her writing, and did not allow Wieland to control her style but instead concentrated on the didactic concepts of the work. She accepted his suggestions positively while claiming control over her creative work all along (Langner 26). La Roche tried to perfect the linguistic skills of women’s writing in the 18th century according to Wieland’s wishes. And precisely this fact alone showed her alignment and conformity to the writing ideals of the language of the male writer. She was not willing to push forward and rise up against societal norms, as would have been expected of a more progressively minded woman writer. To attain the status of a “proper woman” in the 18th century, an activity such as writing required an acceptance of masculine prerogatives and entitlements. Women often produced dominant cultural assumptions and normative prescriptions of “ideal womanhood,” and they disguised this idealized femininity, often at odds with their natural behavior and beliefs (Arons 6). La Roche

displayed this naiveté about the idealized femininity of her heroine. Women writers often stepped outside of their own boundaries to maintain a balance between their own aspirations as artists, while conforming to the ideals of proper womanhood in their respective society of the time (Arons 6-7).

It is evident that even though she pushed for greater freedom for women's education and acceptance into the field of writing, La Roche did not strongly seek autonomy from male influences. All along, the author Sophie von La Roche expressed gratitude for her exceptional education in her father's house, her moral concept, and her ethical sensitivities stemming from the Almighty Creator (Langner 33). For La Roche, it was most important to show a life filled with virtue, as shown in her novel *Lady Sternheim*, and not necessarily the education of girls, as seen in some of her other works. Contradictions can also be seen in La Roche's thinking, when she finds the differences of class at birth unimportant. Humanity, virtue and above all, morality were the most important values. Yet, contrary to this thinking, the elimination of social classes was never even considered or voiced by La Roche. More important than general knowledge, was the understanding and implementation of moral norms and the avoidance of too much sensitivity. Mental and intellectual activity was used as protection from emotional weakness (Langner 36). La Roche took a stance regarding the different sexes: On the one hand, she saw the equal claim and aspiration to virtue and knowledge, but on the other hand she clung to the preservation of traditional roles for men and women. The woman's role as *Hausfrau* was still deeply rooted in La Roche. Education of women was only tolerated as long as it did not present an obstacle to the education of children, and the proper keeping of a household as seen in these words: „Die Pflichten gegen den

Mann und die Kinder stehen an erster Stelle” (Langner 88), claiming that the duties to the husband and children stand in first place. To her female readership, La Roche still insisted that the dominant status of the male should never be questioned.

La Roche missed her lively society in this quiet, rural setting, and she yearned for her previous life in *Warthausen*. At least the first German novel written by a woman had been accomplished. Part I was published in June 1771, followed by Part II in September/October of 1771. To restate, the novel was not published under the name La Roche, but anonymously by Wieland as the publisher. It was still unthinkable for a woman to publish a novel at that time, naming her as the author. Despite all of this, La Roche became famous overnight and she was heralded as the *ganze Ideal von Frauenzimmer*, the true ideal of a woman. Only eight months after the move to Bönningheim, the family had to uproot again, this time to Koblenz. La Roche’s husband Frank von La Roche became *Konferenzminister* of the Prince of Trier (Strohmeyr 160), and it was there where La Roche started having her own well-known literary salon. She welcomed many known scholars and literature greats such as Basedow, Heinse, die Gebrüder Jacobi, Wieland, and most importantly Goethe. Goethe described her salon as „Dichtung und Wahrheit” (poetry and truth), a phrase Goethe used in his autobiography. Goethe himself, at the young age of 22, was rumored to marry Sophie’s daughter Maximiliane, but La Roche did not think this was serious or acceptable, as Goethe would never be able to care for her daughter adequately without a job earning enough money. Daughters were to be married off to wealthy suitors to bolster the family’s connections in society, and at this time Goethe would not have been considered a good choice for Maxe regarding financial security. Maxe, as La Roche affectionately called

her daughter, was supposed to enter a profitable marriage, as opposed to a love marriage such as La Roche's own heroine's marriage between *Lady Sternheim* and *Lord Seymour* in her novel (Strohmeyr 183). During these happy times, La Roche could spend her earnings from her book for charitable causes, as there were no money worries yet. Maximiliane ended up committing herself to a marriage of convenience with the rich widower and businessman Peter Anton Brentano. They had 13 children together, among them were the famed poets Bettina and Clemens Brentano. At this time, in 1774, Goethe wrote the incredibly successful *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, which was considered the harbinger to *Sturm und Drang*. Many scholars saw La Roche's novel *Lady Sternheim* as the precursor to Goethe's famous work. In his novel, Goethe even described the black eyes of his novel's heroine *Lotte* as bearing such similarity to those of La Roche's daughter Maximiliane, all along praising his affection for La Roche's daughter (Strohmeyr 184-186).

Sophie von La Roche continued to live very generously in the house of La Roche. This changed when her husband, who received the status of nobility in 1775, lost his job due to his liberal conviction and criticism of the Church in 1780. Frank von La Roche anonymously published *Briefe über das Mönchswesen* (letters about the life of a monk). The shocking letters fell into the hands of another writer, who further sharpened and voiced these criticisms. In 1780, it was made public that the original writer of this scandalous work was Georg Michael Frank von La Roche (Strohmeyr 161-163). Subsequently, the family lost everything, and was forced to abandon their elegant and luxurious life. A friend of the family took them in and provided them shelter, since the La Roche family was now facing severe poverty. It was at this time that La Roche

started to help bringing money into the family. It was by no means customary for women to be earning a livelihood or even just contributing to the family finances. La Roche's writings were also providing her with personal recognition, but did not generate enough income to feed the family. This activity also offended her husband who would not tolerate that his wife was earning money through her writings, and therefore feeding the family. The German writer Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), a reformer of the German drama and follower of French classicism in literature, published the journal *Die vernünftigen Tadelrinnen* in 1725, already hinting of female editorship in his fictitious works, and foreshadowing the increasing numbers in female readership and female writers. The weekly magazine was specifically directed towards women in the 18th century. Johann Gottsched, along with his wife Luise Gottsched, often called the *Gottschedin*, was trying to integrate their female readership into a cultural life. Women were encouraged to contribute their own works, consisting of letters, poetry and other literary forms (Loster-Schneider, Becker-Cantarino 226-227).

In the late 1770s and 1780s, the first female edited journals appeared (Catling 66). La Roche persisted, did not lose courage, forged forward with her writing endeavors, and finally at the age of 52 published the first magazine for women, *Pomona für Teuschlands Töchter* between 1782 and 1784 (*Brunold-Knop* 7). This exemplifies Sophie von La Roche's determined spirit, by her own choice, to step outside of the assumed role of a woman in society of that time. It brought her success as well as substantial income. In total, 24 magazines of a highly moral nature appeared under this name. She chose the name *Pomona*, after the goddess of fall. La Roche saw herself as being in the fall of her life. According to Brigitte Scherbacher-Posé, La Roche was the

first woman writer who published a German magazine for women specifically (Brunold-Knop 7). La Roche further displayed great courage for a woman, when she started travelling a lot: to Switzerland in 1784, to France in 1785 and to England in 1786. Travel writing was still very new as a form of writing, but La Roche wrote extensively, even though her style was soon considered old-fashioned, and her use of language limited in tone and expression. She kept concrete details in her travel books, which, however, to this day have not been bested for their accuracy of historical content. Catling claims that her first novel *Das Fräulein von Sternheim* reached the height of literary achievement in which “didacticism and literary skill were most successfully combined” (61).

Eventually, the family moved to Speyer and things were starting to improve. With the help of the Brentano family they could acquire a small house in Offenbach am Main. La Roche kept up with her numerous travels and published travel diaries. In 1788, after the return from one of her travels, Sophie von La Roche became a widow at the age of 58 after Frank von La Roche died from complications of a stroke (Strohmeyr 254). Not long after, Sophie von La Roche’s son Franz died in 1791, and in 1793 misfortune struck again when her daughter Maximiliane died. This prompted her to take in seven of her minor grandchildren. At 68 years old, La Roche lost her widow’s pension during the French Revolution when the French occupied the left side of the Rhine, yet she once again showed perseverance by taking up writing to secure some financial security for her family. The years of the French occupation were a difficult time for La Roche, and only in 1799 did she again resume her travelling, this time with her granddaughter Sophie Brentano, the wife of her grandson Clemens. Christoph

Martin Wieland invited both of them to his home close to Weimar, where they remained for several months and it is there, where they moved into the inner circles of the Weimar literary society. La Roche did not quite fit into this society, which regarded her as an amateur without real knowledge in these circles. She could not live up to the new ideals of femininity, and her status in society gradually sank. With the help of Wieland, however, La Roche published two books, *Schattenrisse abgeschiedener Stunden* and *Mein Schreibtisch*. In the year 1807, Maria Sophie von La Roche died at the age of 76 in Offenbach am Main. At first, her works caused great uproar, but later on drifted into obscurity. Her moralizing style did not fit the times with all the changes coming with the revolution. Her goal was to pass on an orientation in life, especially regarding the achievement of independence for women. Enlightenment was the Leitmotiv for her, which always brought her back to seeking the middle ground and avoiding wastefulness and extremes. This moderation was the foundation of her contentment (Strohmeyr 265-294). Before her death, La Roche requested her gravestone to have the following inscription: „Sie war gut und aufrichtig, liebte und ehrte die Menschheit. Sucht ihre Verdienste nicht weiter zu entwickeln, und ziehet ihre Schwachheiten nicht aus ihrem dunkeln Wohnorte hervor. Da ruhen sie beyde in zitternder Hoffnung in dem Schooße ihres Vaters und ihres Gottes“ (She was good and sincere, loved and honored mankind. Do not attempt to develop her merits any further, and do not bring forth her weaknesses from her dark dwellings. There they rest in the lap of her father and her God (Strohmeyr 294). It is quite interesting to note the reference to her father and not mentioning her mother, as one could imagine given the focus and importance of patriarchy. La Roche

tried to imitate her mother throughout her life, but her focus was always to please her father.

3. Birth of the *Frauenroman*

This was the time of the birth of the woman's novel, the *Frauenroman*. Sophie von La Roche created an entirely new type of character for women--*die schöne Seele* (the beautiful soul). It was believed that nobility in people does not herald from outside, given character traits such as heritage and birth, but instead lies in its noble character, its ethical behavior; it is the virtue in people that gives them their nobility. With the help of one's inner values a person can circumvent any given pitfalls of emerging vices, and can become useful to others by finding altruism despite a strong sense of self-love. When it became known that Sophie von La Roche was the author of this courageous book *Lady Sternheim*, many of its readers believed that she was recounting her own life story, and they wanted to learn more about her. This is how Sophie von La Roche stepped into the public limelight, something quite extraordinary at the time. Another highlight was the appearance of her magazine *Pomona*. It offered up an ambiguous mixture of autonomy and tradition. Her female readers received an abundance of information and entertainment at the same time: articles about fashion, health, medicine, nutrition, art and portraits of successful women, as well as letters from readers and advice columns. In those letters, the publisher, acting as a teacher, gave tips reaching from the household to the bedroom, which at times caused quite some stir, and did not sit well with some of the more conventional women readers. Even Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, subscribed to her magazine. Already in the preface of her first magazine, La Roche made clear that she wanted to offer something combatting the publishing of magazines

for women by men, and therefore advocating that this new magazine was written by a woman for women. La Roche's greatest goal was to improve the education of women. She also offered various special magazines pertaining to specific countries, filled with many important cultural and historical facts. Beyond that, she offered recommendations for further readings, always striving to improve the education of her female readers. The standard was limited of course, due to the fact that for many women of this time, it was most important to be a good companion or socialite for their husbands. True or real education as it existed in the man's world was not really sought by Sophie von La Roche at the time (Strohmeyr 265-294). Next, I want to introduce some background information to the novel *Lady Sternheim*, followed by a short summary thereof.

4. Introduction to the novel *Lady Sternheim*

Before I begin the summary of her novel *Lady Sternheim*, a few important key points regarding La Roche's thoughts on equality of the sexes and general moral attitudes of the era need to be examined. Contradictions can be called out in La Roche's thinking when she finds the differences of class at birth unimportant. As I mentioned earlier, La Roche mostly valued an emphasis on humanity, virtue and morality, yet she never proposed changing any of the old class hierarchy assumptions; quite the contrary, she fully accepted those as truths. Sophie von La Roche picked a heroine for her novel that was of mixed descent, half nobility and half bourgeoisie (upper middle class), and she looked at the advantages of nobility in a very critical way in contrast to morality and virtue in the Bourgeoisie (Langner 34). After all, Sophie von La Roche herself emerged out of this mixed class with regards to her own social standing. In her novel, Lady

Sternheim shows great sensibility regarding the problem concerning class differences. She develops projects to educate the ‘common man.’ She establishes orphanages, houses for the poor, possibly trying to bring about a clean conscience, and feeling remorse for her own higher class ranking (Loster-Schneider, Becker-Cantarino 23). For the middle classes, virtue (*Tugend*) was a central point in the novels of the 18th century, and a path to self-discovery for La Roche herself. As Langner states, the inclination to charity work, and the detailed account of the status of the souls of the different characters by the heroine (Lady Sternheim), led to the positive reception by the philosopher Herder. Herder agreed with Goethe, when Goethe wrote with enthusiasm „Ich habe indeßen auch die Geschichte des Fräulein von Sternheim gelesen, mein ganzes Ideal von einem Frauenzimmer! Sanft, zärtlich, wohlthätig, stolz und tugendhaft und betrogen. Ich habe köstliche, herrliche Stunden beym Durchlesen gehabt. Ach, wie weit bin ich noch von meinem Ideal, von mir selbst weg“ (translation mine, I have read the story of *Lady Sternheim* now, my complete ideal of a woman, tender, affectionate, benevolent, proud, virtuous and betrayed. I have enjoyed exquisite hours of reading. Oh how far am I still from my own true ideal) (Langner 46). Sophie von La Roche’s heroine was considered the ideal woman of the eighteenth century. The following will be a short synopsis of the novel *Lady Sternheim* (*Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*). It is literature written in the form of an epistolary novel, a novel composed of many different letters interspersed with short sections of narrative written by the protagonist Sophia Sternheim to her close friend Emilia. Christoph Martin Wieland is named as the editor of La Roche’s *Lady Sternheim*. The preface is written by Wieland addressed: An D.F.G.R.V. (an die Frau Geheime Rätin Von La Roche) and presents a

riddle. Praise is given to Sophie von La Roche, often affectionately called „Die Sternheim” by her readers. La Roche herself wanted to remain anonymous (Strohmeyer 140-1).

5. Summary of *Lady Sternheim*

The plot tells about the importance of virtue during a young woman’s life of distress, and her continuous goal to make a good and useful life for herself. In the story, young Sophia is the daughter of ennobled Colonel Sternheim, who receives his status of nobility by marrying a noblewoman. Here we can already see she chooses a heroine bearing the same name as the author of the novel. It is important to point out that the last name ‘Sternheim’ means star home in the German language, referring to her home being in the stars, mythical, dreamy, romantic and unattainable (Munns and Richards 144). There are class differences apparent in the story from the beginning. Together with Sophia, their only child, the couple leads a happy marriage. The mother dies at a young age, and only a few years later, Sophia’s beloved father also perishes. Orphaned Sophia is placed into the care of a pastor (her friend Emilia’s father) and her conniving, mean-spirited aunt, Countess Löbbau. The aunt intends to make Sophia the mistress of the local prince in order to gain financial and status-oriented favors at the expense of her niece. To point out the obvious contradiction in her inner nature, Sophia shows great interest in her new home, the fancy estate where she stays with her aunt, but misses her simple, tranquil country life that she is used to. At the court of the prince, Sophia meets two noblemen with very different intentions. One of these noblemen is kind and melancholic Lord Seymour who falls in love with her immediately, but seems unable to reveal his true feelings to her. The other is Lord Derby, a vile and selfish man out for

his own interests. At the same time, Sophia's aunt aims to win a favorable position with the prince by using Sophia in a mean-spirited game by trying to make her the prince's mistress. Sophia is very distraught, and after Lord Derby hears of the plan to marry Sophia off to the prince, he tricks innocent Sophia into running away with him, so he could save her from the prince. All along, Lord Derby, whose advances Sophia resists consistently, wants to gain possession of her as his own, and talks vulnerable and scared Sophia into a sham marriage with him. Blind to his scam, she readily accepts his dishonest marriage proposal in order to get away from all the turmoil at court. Sternheim lives with Derby as his wife but cannot really show him her true love, she dresses again in her innocent, white English dresses, which make her look angelic and pure. She gives off an aura of sensuality and desire but is yet unwilling to give herself to Derby. Angered Lord Derby kidnaps Sophia and her friend Emilia, and moves them into the countryside where he leaves them behind, but only after raping Sophia and declaring their marriage invalid. Sophia is left battered, betrayed, embarrassed and disappointed. Gaining strength and feeling encouraged by Emilia's family, who is looking after both of them at this time, Sophia adjusts to her new life in the country, now calling herself 'Madame Leidens' (trans. Mrs. Suffering). She begins her new endeavor of educating poor country girls, even establishing a "seminary of domestics" for the disadvantaged girls of the poor region. There, she makes the acquaintance of Lady Summer, a benevolent, elderly English woman who is interested in starting such seminaries in her homeland, England. After agreeing to travel to England with Lady Summer, Sophia meets Mrs. Summer's scholarly neighbor Mr. Rich, who is immediately struck by Sophia's grace and beauty. Using trickery, Lord Derby once

again arranges to have Sophia abducted from Lady Summer's estate, and holds her prisoner in a wooded area in a desolate region of Scotland. After recovering from her initial shock, Sophia becomes friends with the very poor people around her, her actual keepers. Sophia accepts her fate and ends up becoming the tutor for their poor children, mostly girls, and also for the illegitimate daughter of Lord Derby's cast aside mistress, who had previously passed away. Sophia dedicates her life to the upbringing of Lord Derby's orphaned daughter, lives in plain white clothes, and spreads goodwill and morality among the poor around her. Her Spartan wardrobe reminds of a plain, yet enlightened life full of pure and natural morality. Twice in the story, Sternheim returned to her roots and changed her wardrobe to plain clothing. Her beauty stems from her pure soul, not the elegant and beautiful clothes she wore at the Court (Munns and Richards 150). Once again Lord Derby sends for his friend John to bring Sophia to him after having grown tired of his present wife. After refusing to go with him, Derby's companion has Sophia thrown into a dungeon, bleeding, badly injured and left to die. Her former keepers eventually locate her and save her. Meanwhile in England, Lord Derby is on his death bed, and confesses to Lord Seymour about the location of Sophia, and the ill treatment she suffered at his hands. After hearing of Sophia's alleged death, Lord Seymour and Lord Rich, who turns out to be Lord Seymour's older half-brother, travel to Scotland to bring back the body of the now assumed dead Sophia. When they reach the Scottish Highlands, they find Sophia alive. A makeshift grave was misleading any rescuers of her death. This reminds strongly of an allusion to the resurrection of Christ from his tomb. Lord Seymour proposes marriage to Sophia, and she immediately agrees to marry him. Finally, after all of her trying adventures and hardship, Sophia and

Lord Seymour are united again and she is able start the new and tranquil life she always sought to have (La Roche, Reclam). Through her adventures and suffering, Sophia learns that virtue and doing unselfish, noble deeds for others are the true and only joy in her life. Elements of female utopia can be seen only towards the end of her novel, when La Roche describes the Seymour household, which is not described as following social norms. The carefree and blissful countryside is in stark contrast to the oppressive court life (Brown 477). La Roche's Sternheim organizes her surroundings according to her own wishes. With limited tools available to her, she establishes both a hospital and a school, displaying the virtues of her benevolent character. In this text, La Roche is showcasing the new possibilities available for women to step away from male dominance, and thereby creating and fulfilling their own life's dreams and wishes (Brown 477). Virtue and charity are recurring ideals of the female character during the eighteenth century.

6. Analysis and criticism

The secondary literature pertaining to Sophie von La Roche's *Lady Sternheim* and her other extensive works comprises a vast number of critical, sometimes supportive, and at other times opposing articles and comments written by a great number of writers and literary scholars. The publisher and La Roche's friend Wieland assumed the right to change and interpret the words of the female author Sophie von La Roche. From the beginning, La Roche "became identified with her own heroine rather than being properly recognized for her contribution to the epistolary novel as a literary genre usually identified with Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe" (Munns and Richards 155). The novel itself was called a work of fiction by Wieland, but the fact that the novel was

written primarily with the help of a collection of letters, written by real subjects, shows its epistolary character. It is often very difficult to separate reality from theatrical performance, and thereby shows its duplicity in the novel. The novel moves from displays of theater (the peasant party in the country or masquerade ball at court) to very realistic situations like the various abductions of Lady Sternheim or the fake marriage to Lord Derby (Arons 60). This duplicity often seemed like a spectacle filled with artificial and elaborate displays in great contrast to the disclosure of the true inner self. According to Koepke, this exuberance of emotions often seemed like an escape from *Langeweile und Freudlosigkeit* (trans. boredom and joylessness) to an artificial island of happiness without worries (620).

It is important to point to the emerging idea of selfhood in the German-speaking world which can be traced back to two distinct, original ideas: one is the idea of pietism and the “cult of interiority”, and the other the “idea of an organic self-regulated totality” (Lehleiter 21). In the eighteenth century the realization of the ‘self’ as an autonomous human being stood in the forefront all of a sudden. The novel by La Roche is a reflection of the era of Enlightenment as well as *Empfindsamkeit* (Catling 63). The absolutely unique individual was a fascinating novelty. Questions of faith, marriage and love consumed the rising bourgeoisie with its self-confidence, which explains the massive success of *Lady Sternheim*. The common people did not attain greater political power during this time but they found their ‘compensation’ in the realms of education. *Bildung* (education) supplied the value that they were seeking at the time, while access to true political matters was still denied to them (Lehleiter 22). Writing played the role of forming this new autonomy women were seeking. The writer Marianne Ehrmann

(1753-1795) provided for her family's livelihood and showed similarities to La Roche. Women were slowly becoming public figures, and paving the way for women publicists of the 19th century (Brandes 181). The eighteenth century was characterized as the century of friendship and socializing (*Jahrhundert der Freundschaft und Geselligkeit*), and was often also called the century of letters (*Jahrhundert des Briefes*) or *Jahrhundert der Pädagogik* (trans. century of pedagogy). Almost all aspects of human life were newly defined and questioned in this era of enlightenment which is marked by societal changes, scientific progress, continued secularization, economic expansion, the discovery of new worlds, of wars and political changes. Not surprisingly, as stated by Monika Nenon, the roles of the genders and the ensuing education of girls became an often discussed topic of the times (Nenon, in Eichenauer's anthology 183). Eighteenth century texts focused on ideas of selfhood were strictly gender oriented, and it was then that the sentimental novel came into focus--mostly for women. Friedrich Schlegel's essay "On Goethe's Meister" shapes this gender alignment of genres and characters. Friedrich Schlegel categorizes *Empfindsamkeit* as a strictly feminine characteristic compared with education as a male attribute. The *Bildungsroman* (educational novel) by his own laws should belong to the masculine gender only and exclude women. In the *Bildungsroman* there is always a masculine protagonist who is the only one able to understand and master the development in the story (Lehleiter 23). Citing one of Friederike Helene Unger's articles, Dr. Birte Giesler claims that transferring masculine role models to female ones would cause extreme confusion. Furthermore, Giesler alludes to the unique genre of a novel featuring female selfhood, as in La Roche's novel *Lady Sternheim*. Goethe, Herder and Lenz all praised the female fictional main

protagonist in La Roche's novel. Sophie von La Roche, the author, was herself often alluded to as the role model for her heroine's character. The figure was praised by Wieland as having "this unadorned sincerity of the soul [...], this gentle feeling of the true and beautiful, this practicing of every virtue, stemming from an inner source, this honest piousness" and speaks of "voluntary emerging fruit of nature" (Lehleiter 25). Sophie von La Roche specifically modeled Lady Sternheim in this pious fashion full of divine grace, and I intend to show the inconsistencies in her depictions.

This is precisely where the part of the masquerades and the various dress styles in the interpretation of the novel are of greatest importance. The female protagonist is trying to hide her true virtuous being behind an unnatural disguise using a mask. She cannot blend into the artificial games of fancy dress and behavior at court, and uses this disguise for her natural self. Her rural country background does not fit the demands at the court (Lehleiter 27). Barbara Becker-Cantarino points out the differences in life style between the superficiality in the aristocratic life at court and the genuinely natural and virtuous Lady Sternheim whose actions are continually judged by everyone around her (Merck 367). The sheer hypocrisy in La Roche's heroine's mind succumbs to the artificial masquerades at court, and she feels forced into this unnatural lifestyle. She fully rejects the aristocratic focus on appearance and beauty, but at the same time is flattered when her own beauty is admired at court. There is a direct conflict in these feelings, and La Roche is struggling with finding her true identity experiencing "existential insecurity," and therefore she is constantly driven to uncover her true internal belief system. La Roche starts doubting herself when she realizes how she gains

selfhood and feelings of acceptance through the approving sentiments of others (Lehleiter 28). Already in the previous decade, Adam Smith (1723-90), a British philosopher, writes about the feelings of self when seen through the eyes of others in his work *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759): “We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgement concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our natural station, and endeavor to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavoring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them” (Smith 110). La Roche’s novel highlights the ongoing distinction between reality and fiction through the use of masks and masquerades. The novel’s heroine Sternheim participates in the theatricality at court and the displaying of costumes and masks, yet at the same time she resents the artificial environment and the countless hours that women spend in front of the mirror to achieve certain unnatural looks. This stands in stark contrast to Sternheim’s love of everything natural and simple (Arons 58-59). Barbara Becker-Cantarino exposes the contradiction La Roche’s heroine Sophia Sternheim displays regarding the protagonist’s naturalness and focus on a virtuous life with “the superficiality of the aristocratic lifestyle” of her new noble family (Lehleiter 26).

Here it is also of great importance to see the significance of La Roche’s pietist upbringing, and the impact it had on empowering women like her. La Roche received a strong education anchored in pietism during her childhood in the house of her father, and it was this strong belief system that guided her throughout her life. The pietist movement “played an important role in facilitating female authorship and the notion of the female virtuous protagonist” (Lehleiter 26). Writer La Roche seems to have been

torn by her belonging to two different worlds, starting in her childhood. Sophia von Sternheim's own background can be labelled a form of misalliance, a combination of a mixed background of a noble mother and bourgeois father. For her parents, aristocracy means showing a generous heart and giving to the less fortunate people, and exemplifying the good governance of their estate, which Sophia Sternheim makes her own life's goal (Catling 62). The heroine Sophia remembers her doting mother, whose "likeness she wanted to re-create in herself," when La Roche herself suggests that even the "pure, true, natural, and authentic self emerges by means of imagination" (Lehleiter 30). La Roche's own life seems to be immersed in masquerades and appearances; even the life in the salons could be included as a form of masquerade. The interest in this field lies in what these texts of the 18th century by women writers reveal about how women thought about relationships between female subjectivity and performance. These works provide great insights into how women were viewing femininity during this period in which gender was being more firmly cemented to biological sex, and the ways in which women writers might have resisted the process (Arons 11). "Ideas about performance and theatricality pervade the work" (Arons 11), and *Sternheim* divulges many of the concerns about performances and sincerity that numerous future actors will worry about. "La Roche's novel displays a deep concern about the ethics of performance and the dangers of dissimulation, and seems to reproduce the era's ideology of sincerity and authenticity" (Arons 11). The concept of adopting such ideas is expressed by Immanuel Kant in this text written in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (2007, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [1798]):

[T]he more civilized human beings are, the more they are actors. They adopt the illusion of affection, of respect for others, of modest, and of unselfishness without deceiving anyone at all, because it is understood by everyone that nothing is meant sincerely by this. And it is also very good that this happens in the world. For when human beings play these rules, eventually the virtues, whose illusion they have merely affected for a considerable length of time, will gradually really be aroused and merge into the disposition (263).

The “Sophie” of the 18th century was expected to be modest, chaste, honest, loyal, and subordinate to her husband, a good mother, patient, kind-hearted, generous, self-sacrificing, demure, and fragile. Far into the 20th century, these feminine attributes are deeply rooted in a woman’s “nature”. These same ideas still hold true in our times. The 1800s established which characteristics were feminine, and furthermore insisted on these traits to be essential and natural, all to prove femininity. Eighteenth century ‘Sophia’ was the model woman for ideal femininity- a “virtuous woman would be natural, and that she would be naturally sincere, authentic, and naïve” (Arons 17-18). Yet, Sophia presents herself to be very unsure about her own self at court, confused about what her own self actually is. When Sophia writes to her friend Emily in a letter, the first one after her mother’s death, she casts doubt on how similar or dissimilar she actually is to her mother. All she wanted was to be virtuous like her dead mother, and now this does not seem to be so clear anymore. What if the dress was the only thing they had in common....she wonders. Are the clothes the true identity of a person and where is the true self... questions she is fearfully pondering (Lehleiter 29). Sophia is

constantly trying to find her place in her world and finding her true pietist nature. She lives among peasants as well as aristocracy, in pastoral homes and at court. Her differing wardrobe is adjusted to her lifestyle at each segment in time and she slides into these roles perfectly to please everyone around herself. She prefers white, simple but elegant, robes in the English style just like her mother before her; she is “attractive without being beautiful, she moves with grace, and her appearance is a reflection of her soul.” Her maid says of Sophia, “every kind of dress suited her well, and I heard my Lord Seymour say that in each fold there nestled its own particular grace” (Munns and Richards 145). When Sophia was a child, she was introduced as the replacement for her deceased mother to her father. He instructs her to wear her mother’s clothes, the ‘right’ clothes, white linen dresses to show purity and virtue. Sophia reminded her father in so many ways of her mother, her voice, gestures, her kindness and cheerfulness, her clothes, and even stature (Lehleiter 29). She wanted to create an image of herself in the likeness of her mother, for herself, as well as for her beloved father, which once again shows her dependence on her father. After Sophia arrives at Court she realizes that the dressing style of her mother is now completely out of fashion, and in order to fit in she is forced to get accustomed to a new style. This new French elegant style makes her uncomfortable at first but she does not rebel or speak up regarding these changes in garments. She misses her old life in the country, the simplicity, and the solitude in nature. On one hand, Sternheim sees this inequality at court and feels for the destitute peasants, yet on the other hand she still participates and enjoys these glamorous events at court. It shows her confusion of mind between her love for the simple and natural life, and her current lifestyle among nobility. She denies recognizing the immorality at

court (Munns and Richards 146-147). Once again, it is Sophia herself who engages in a sort of ‘masquerade’, as she is trying to imitate the picture of her mother left imprinted on her mind. Here again we see the importance of dressing, of masquerading ideas to attain certain outcomes, but Sophia is too naïve and genuine to be able to understand these “games.” Sophia does not realize the true intentions of honest and amiable Lord Seymour, and casts him aside, not recognizing his true identity behind the white mask. However, she innocently succumbs to the intrigues of Lord Derby and follows him down a dark and sinister path away from her true love. These false roles lead her astray and her genuine ways cannot see through the dark and evil thoughts of Lord Derby. She elopes with him, feeling herself secretly married to him but being betrayed. Here we can see the importance the masks played in the future of Lady Sternheim’s life (Munns and Richards 147). Sophia’s true goal was to please her father. Immanuel Kant explains that the person wearing the mask internalizes these feelings, and they become reality themselves. People create their own realities by changing this mask over and over, “one mask to another” (Lehleiter 29). Selfhood in itself becomes conditioned by the exchanges the self goes through. The heroine Sophia creates a keepsake, a memory of her parents, by putting small pictures of her dead parents inside small compartments of a bracelet, and fills in the gaps with the earth taken from their gravesite (La Roche, *The History of Lady Sophia Sternheim* 75). This earth placed within the bracelet signifies the stability that Sophia is trying to find and keep for herself. These memories cannot be exchanged or altered, and provide strength and safety for Sophia.

To summarize, La Roche's selfhood cannot be taken as a natural phenomenon; she constantly re-invents herself, and often opposes the constrictions placed on women. This can be seen as a precursor of female emancipation, but at the same time she is insisting on adhering to the presumed ideals of the past. Lehleiter asserts that Sophie von La Roche was "a progressive and independent thinker who significantly contributed to the foundation of the debate about gender and subjectivity that has taken place in the past fifty year(s)" (33). In my opinion, Sophie von La Roche did move women's rights forward, and she was quite influential towards the goal of emancipation, especially regarding women's education, but should not be labelled a feminist quite yet. Certainly, La Roche was not a feminist in the sense of political freedom as we understand it today, but she most definitely developed a greater and more defined selfhood for women and thus significantly contributed to the debate about gender in the 18th century. La Roche's greatest advancement for women eventually manifested itself in her push for better education for girls, and also in the establishment of women in the field of writing, which I will discuss in the next segment.

Sophie von La Roche was a master at the art of communication, as can already be seen in the social net she developed around her salon, which benefited her at the time when she started establishing her writing career (Nenon, „Sophie von La Roche's Literarische Salongesellschaft in Koblenz-Ehrenbreitstein 1772-1780" 283). As La Roche's own writings are compared to writers such as Rousseau, Campe or Basedow, Worley writes in her review article that the type of pedagogical, didactic writing used in her novel was geared towards women in a very specific stage in their lives. This education for women was written to coincide with a very specific time of their lives.

This becomes very obvious when considering who La Roche was addressing in her women's magazines. The influence she achieved as an educator of women reached beyond women of aristocracy or bourgeoisie, even beyond German borders, eventually even reaching the Russian Zsar's wife in St. Petersburg. Worley writes in her review article of Nenon's book *Autorschaft und Frauenbildung: Das Beispiel Sophie von La Roche* that in the end, even though La Roche's protagonist Sophia Sternheim reaches "a safe landing in the matrimonial harbor after virtuous navigations around various impediments" (545), the author Nenon insists that this interpretation would only downplay the true meaning behind her story. I claim that La Roche more importantly shows her protagonist's steadfastness to her virtuous self while in her darkest hours trying to better the lives of women around her. This was a lesson she was trying to get across to her readers, the education of the virtuous soul. This, in my opinion, amounted to the greatest goal and achievement of the writer Sophie von La Roche. In support of my statement, Erlis Glass, in another review work responding to Monika Nenon's book *Autorschaft und Frauenbildung: Das Beispiel Sophie von La Roche*, suggests that La Roche was very strongly speaking in favor of improvement of education for women in order to support themselves and their families, but at the same time staying true to the idea of women keeping their traditional ideals. La Roche never suggests to these women to become writers themselves. There seems to be some conflict in her message as she travels and tries to gain independence for herself, but simultaneously tells her readers to educate themselves and use this newly acquired knowledge, yet stay true to the tradition to become better mothers, housekeepers and conversational partners to their husbands (Glass 517). Again, we learn of La Roche's push for better education for

women, but not actually freeing women from male domination. La Roche always existed in the shadow of a man, her father, lover, cousin or husband. In La Roche's novel, whenever the innocence of the heroine is threatened, virtue is mentioned, and ideal behavior, often charity and benevolence, is performed. This moral attitude and strength gives her support, even in her most trying times, as seen in Lady Sternheim's captivity in Scotland by Lord Derby (Langner 34). According to Volkmar Hansen, La Roche does not paint her characters in the novel in a simple one-layered way; even the villain Lord Derby becomes the victim of his "passions," even he displays strong emotions that he is not able to tame and contain, and by this inability to conquer his feelings, he ultimately seeks revenge on the virtuous and steadfast Lady Sternheim (Hansen 168). For La Roche, it is always most important to show a life filled with virtue in her novel *Lady Sternheim*, and not necessarily the education of girls, as in some of her other works. More important than general knowledge, is the realization and implementation of moral norms and the avoidance of too much sensitivity. Mental (intellectual) activity is used as protection from emotional weakness. In 1771, La Roche refers to the "Winckelmannsche Ideal" (*edle Einfalt* = noble innocence), a model that moves towards the anthropology of the self-empowerment of the responsible and mature human being (Hansen 170). It is the emancipation from the *Schöne Seele* (beautiful soul) to an acting, often suffering human being that gains strength in the process.

Often, La Roche takes an ambiguous stance regarding the different genders: on the one hand she sees the equal claim or aspiration of virtue and knowledge, but on the other hand she accepts, even endorses the preservation of traditional roles of men and women (Langner 36). Between 1783 and 1784, the monthly magazine *Pomona* appears;

all contributions were predominantly written by La Roche, with the exception of a few selections that were handpicked by the author herself. The magazine was dedicated to an all-female readership. The goal was to promote and spread the necessity of a general education for all women in a superficially chatting tone in order to impart at least a minimum of knowledge to her female readers (Langner 78). The sole purpose was to impart knowledge necessary for young women to lead a beautiful and happy life while at the same time rejecting the imposition of scholarliness. This showed that La Roche still regarded women as submissive to men; she calls the learned women (*Gelehrte Frauen*) exceptions, but not quite convicted or condemned exceptions (Langner 79). La Roche justifies her courage to publish this progressive women's magazine, as it was called by others as the work „eines artigen jungen Weibgens“ (Langner 80), trans. of a well-behaved and dutiful little woman. La Roche herself saw the publication as a „Wagnis“ (trans. gamble) giving in to strong requests and encouragement from her friends. Many other women writers at this time were in contact with Christoph Wieland to publish their works because they didn't want to ruin their good reputation. Women in the upper middle class needed a mentor along with the permission of their husbands to publish their work. They often sent their poetry and other writings to magazines in order to get those published anonymously. La Roche inspired a generation of daughters and granddaughters with her publication of 'Pomona' and her novel *Lady Sternheim*. This generation included her future granddaughter Bettine von Arnim (Becker-Cantarino, *Schriftstellerinnen im 18. Jahrhundert*, in Eichenauer's anthology 206). La Roche reflected on the rules of reading for women as a representation of all things concerning women, compared with the intensive style of reading enjoyed by men only. The author

stood at the beginning of the revolution of female readers, as the heightened female readership in Wieland's time grew rapidly. The religious literature during Pietism and the educational demands of the Enlightenment influenced the ability to read for women, and eventually led to feminization of literature, which caused the rise of the *Schöne Literatur* (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe zu Büchern* 16-17). The goal of reading for La Roche was the expression of one's own mind or intellect, almost like a conversation with oneself, a monologue (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe zu Büchern* 33).

To recap, the novel by La Roche is a reflection of the era of Enlightenment as well as *Empfindsamkeit* (Catling 63). La Roche's protagonist Sophia shows strength and resolve to not fall apart due to her misfortunes and pain, but instead to gain momentum and strength to overcome her obstacles. She still cannot control her own destiny, but through her continuous good work and deed she remains useful and positive. The story shows the dependence of women on the men in their lives, and simultaneously their vulnerability to them. *Frauenliteratur* was born when Wieland referred to her as a "lovable creature", shielding her from strict critics, and defending her authorship and morally good nature (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 290). La Roche portrayed the heroine as a sensitive and virtuous woman to please the bourgeoisie, but simultaneously pushed for self-determination and independence. This new, active woman had not been seen before, and she went against the societal norms of the time. She painted these women as outsiders of society. Women in romance novels had always been depicted as objects of the desires and needs by men, or as caretakers of households. Lady Sternheim, the heroine of her novel, saw it as her task and ultimate goal to work

for financially disadvantaged women, but still with the intent of making good wives and mothers out of them. It is for this reason that I believe Sophie von La Roche cannot be regarded a fully emancipated woman yet. Even though La Roche succeeded in putting the status of women in the forefront, and making great strides in advancing female roles in society by focusing on their own female identity, she did not quite go far enough to break free of the long-adhered traditions of where women stood in society. There was still male domination and tutelage by men. Her novel *Lady Sternheim* and her other works did not advocate female autonomy quite yet, but have made great progress for women in literature, and therefore La Roche set out to give women some long-awaited power and freedom within their societal constraints. Female socialization and friendships of self-realization are still kept within the realm of patriarchy (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 291). In her novel, as well as her travel journals, La Roche emphasizes the education and expansion of knowledge of girls, pertaining to good housekeeping, animal husbandry and farming. The novel with its prose style specifically serves as a pedagogical tool for the education of young girls and women by combining moral philosophy with instructional and factual information. It does not, however, seek equality for women in society as a whole. The author Sophie von La Roche does not seek a revolutionary change in the gender roles, but rather advertises a guidebook for the ideal and harmonious marriage in the 18th century.

La Roche's career was made up of friendships and literary works La Roche did not overstep the boundaries that the bourgeois society set upon her. She could not and would not endanger her position in society, especially due to the all-importance of the well-being of her husband and children (Frederiksen and Ametsbichler 293-295).

III. DOROTHEA SCHLEGEL MENDELSSOHN

In the following paragraphs I intend to highlight some of the major ideas and value systems, including literature and philosophy, that greatly influenced the life style in German society in the years lasting from 1720 to 1830 during the time of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*, 1720-1785) partially coinciding with Early Romanticism (*Romantik*, 1795-1830). As already seen in La Roche's life, society was moving rapidly from the philosophical and writing style of Classicism and Enlightenment to a society focused on higher emotional awareness and harmony (Wuchterpfennig 137). The era Dorothea Schlegel was born into was called 'Early Romanticism', a time when the focus was on feelings, beauty and nature. It was the strong understanding of the *Romantiker* that the harmony that the *Klassik* period tried to strive for could only become achieved through the realization that society become a single unit in nature. Love and the renewed search for Christianity set the romantics on a course of disagreement with the rational religion found in Enlightenment and the church itself (Wuchterpfennig 120). The *Romantik* era was a time that not only looked to the past, but simultaneously was a concept of the time creating new ideals. The era showed how mankind was hovering around a new idea of a time approaching modernity. Man was unsure, always trying to renew himself, finding his true identity, and finding new paths forward. He tried to fully capture a world that was becoming ever more complex in its ideas.

In the second part of this research paper I will examine Dorothea Schlegel's role in the emergence of female emancipation, and her progressive push to alter life for women writers as experienced in her own life. Dorothea Schlegel (née Mendelssohn) was born in 1764, almost exactly thirty years after Sophie von La Roche, and at first it

might seem as if she followed the ideas of a traditional woman of the time, yet I will show that she was breaking the gender rules associated with women's roles during the time of the Enlightenment, as well as Romanticism. This was the time of a juncture between these two eras, when a romantic form of reasoning was introduced. This will be made apparent in the choosing of the female characters in Schlegel's novel *Florentin* and in the protagonist Florentin himself. Presenting herself as a very strong woman, the author, daughter of Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, chose a male main character in her novel and distanced herself from the norm right away. During that time, very few women writers chose a male protagonist as the hero of their novels. Dorothea Schlegel distanced herself from the classic idea of the romantic women's novel, in which the environment of a female protagonist was usually depicted. The author used this chance to further explore the female living space, and break through the previously fixed gender roles.

1. Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Schlegel

It is of great importance to review the life of Schlegel's father, the well-known Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and that of her second husband Friedrich Schlegel. Moses Mendelssohn's thoughts on social and religious reform, his ideas of pedagogy and social welfare can be recognized in his daughter Dorothea Schlegel's writings. Both Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Schlegel exerted a great influence on her life. At this point I want to give some historical background information on Moses Mendelssohn, followed by information about Dorothea Schlegel's future husband Friedrich Schlegel.

Well-known German Jewish Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was born during the period of Enlightenment. It is vital to understand that Moses Mendelssohn was born in the same period as Sophie von La Roche, a generation before the birth of Dorothea Schlegel. His life started in the Jewish ghetto of Dessau, Germany, and he became known as the one “who would not only be a great Enlightenment philosopher, but would also build important bridges between isolated Jewish society and the German world at large” (Schlegel, *Florentin- A Novel* ii). For the first time, you could be called a German and a Jew at the same time. It is widely asserted that “Before this time, one could not think of a German Jew” (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* ii). The philosopher’s circle of German literary and philosophical friends and acquaintances included Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Immanuel Kant and several other important scholars and thinkers of the time. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1719-1781), a German critic, philosopher and dramatist, became a close friend to Mendelssohn in 1754, and proved to be of great influence on the Mendelssohn family (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* iv). It is essential to stress the powerful and close association of literary and philosophical minds in the midst of the Mendelssohn family. Again, we learn of the same circumstances regarding the upbringing of the young daughters Sophie von La Roche (née Gutermann) and Dorothea Schlegel (née Brendel Mendelssohn) in literary circles of their fathers’ homes. Eventually Moses Mendelssohn got married and enjoyed the position of a *Schutzjude* (protected Jew, granted in 1763), and it was this protection that provided him with special liberties living in Germany as a person of Jewish heritage (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* v). During this time in Germany, Jews enjoyed very few privileges and were

labelled *Bettlerjude* (Jewish beggar) or *Schutzjude* (protected Jew), a higher status which Mendelssohn achieved through the positive reputation from his philosophical works. In particular, *Phaidon* (“On the Soul”), where he described the immortality of the soul, brought Mendelssohn great fame in the literary circles. He helped to assimilate the Jews into German society by translating many Hebrew and Yiddish works into the German language (Becker-Cantarino, *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik* 117). Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, a new movement, later called the counter-Enlightenment period, began and moved quickly towards Romanticism. Many young members of the Jewish society were gravitating towards a modern life in the city and even rejecting Judaism, the religion of their forefathers. It is important to point to the interconnectedness between hero-like figure Moses Mendelssohn and the search for a place that young Jews envisioned for themselves in German society (Feiner 208).

Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), a theorist during the era of romanticism, is best known for his works published in the magazine ‘*Athenäum*’ (Millan-Zaibert 12). He belonged to a group of philosophers which included Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Novalis, and others who made up the group called the *Jenaer Romantik* (writers and philosophers of the “Early Romantic Movement” in the area of Jena, Germany). Unlike the philosopher Kant, who possessed a strong scientific background, Schlegel’s background “was strictly philological,” meaning that his knowledge lay in the study of literature (Millan-Zaibert 11). The focus of the group was the liberation of everyone’s thinking, reasoning, and the understanding of the ‘Ich’ in relationship to the entire world around oneself. This was the subjective idealism and realization of the unique individual. Schlegel was poeticizing the world around him in

his romantic poetry culminating in his *Universalpoesie* (Rötzer 132). Having given some background information of the philosophy and literature of the time, I now want to move forward to the introduction of Brendel Mendelssohn, daughter of Moses Mendelssohn.

I will concentrate on Brendel Mendelssohn's life, and both her marriages to showcase her views on traditional as well as progressive, non-traditional gender roles. Even though at first Dorothea Mendelssohn Schlegel seems to display traditional female characteristics, it is my opinion that more often we will see her emerging progressive, feminist features in life in general, as well as in her story telling of *Florentin*, her most well-known novel. Her work will show many unconventional, even radical traits, as experienced in her own life's story growing up in a Jewish family in 18th century Germany.

2. Biography of Brendel Mendelssohn

Long before the actual birth of Dorothea Schlegel, her history began. Brendel Mendelssohn, her given name at birth, was one of ten children born into one of Berlin's most well-known Jewish families. Brendel was the eldest daughter of German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and his Jewish wife Fromet (Daub 151). Out of this marriage, eight children reached adulthood, among them Brendel born in 1764, who later became well-known as Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit Schlegel. The home Brendel will be born into was already called *Ort der Aufklärung* (place of enlightenment), and it was known as the center of "Jewish Enlightenment and Emancipation" (Frank 16). The

Jews during this time were not fully accepted citizens but lived as outsiders in society with unique rules and duties. They enjoyed various levels of protection but held no rights of citizenship at that time. Brendel grew up in a staunchly patriarchal family. It was Moses Mendelssohn's decision to educate his children in his own home, giving them the best and most well-rounded education he could offer. Just like La Roche's father Gutermann, this already showed Moses Mendelssohn's forward thinking regarding the social norm in society, as most people in his position had hired educators and tutors for their families. This was Moses Mendelssohn's way of overseeing the children's education personally, specifically concentrating his efforts on his eldest daughter Brendel who already at a very young age showed tremendous intelligence and talents (Schlegel, Florentin, Reclam viii).

Moses Mendelssohn's worldviews were closer in line with the beliefs of the followers of Enlightenment who put more emphasis on reason and knowledge compared to the Romantics' interest in feelings and internal emotions. At the same time, the philosopher Mendelssohn showed traits of Romanticism when he decided to give his daughter Brendel an education not normally bestowed upon women. The unique education of his daughter Brendel, based on her intellectual abilities, went against Mendelssohn's own rigid rules of strict obedience to the accepted rules established during the era of Enlightenment. This displays the restrictiveness of the Enlightenment period that Mendelssohn is trying to break away from. It is easy to understand how Brendel's upbringing and education caused contradictory, often confusing ideas in her young and talented mind. In addition to traditional subjects, Mendelssohn was giving her "private lectures on philosophy and religion" (Schlegel, Florentin, Reclam viii). It

was Brendel's father Moses Mendelssohn who was considered "the first modern Jew" (Frank 17). He contributed immensely to lessen the prejudices and defamation of the Jewish population in Germany. He wrote his philosophical works in German as opposed to Yiddish, translated the *Torah* into German, and introduced German culture to the Jews. It was a time when some Christian Germans were starting to change their negative views about their Jewish neighbors. However, there were others who opposed his endeavors by claiming that he was destroying the Jewish traditions. At this time, Mendelssohn was already befriended by Lessing who integrated him into German Enlightenment circles (Frank 18). Many known writers, philosophers and other scholars, both Jews and Christians, regularly frequented the Mendelssohn home or other gathering places for lively discussions about religion, tolerance, and philosophical matters (Frank 21). Brendel, from a young age on, was aware of these meetings and was even encouraged to listen in or participate to some degree. According to the social order of the Jewish family, the father of the household was the patriarch and demanded strict obedience. This order of strict adherence to the rules of the father of the household, called a patriarchal system, was practiced in the 18th century throughout all of the faiths in Germany. Even though Moses Mendelssohn seemed to show tolerant views regarding women of this era, the author Frank argues that „Die jüdische Familie war streng und patriarchalisch. Das Alte Testament und die jüdische Ethik verstehen die Frau als minderwertiges, zweitrangiges Wesen und verpflichten sie zu unbedingtem Gehorsam gegenüber Männern, sei es der Vater oder der Ehemann“ (Frank 24-26). Here the author describes the rules of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition as requiring the absolute need for obedience from women, whom it characterizes as inferior and second

class to not only their fathers, but also their husbands. Moses Mendelssohn did not share this extreme view, but he believed in the patriarchal order of the family. Women were not allowed to attend university studies, which in most circumstances greatly lowered their own education standards for Germans. Brendel, as well as her mother and all other females, were responsible for household chores, and for helping the male members of the family. They followed the traditional gender roles of a family living in Germany at the time.

3. Becoming Dorothea Veit Schlegel

It was at one of these gatherings where young Brendel would meet Simon Veit, her future husband, a Jewish banker of secure means. Brendel was well aware of the special status her family held in society where their home was frequented by “great minds of the German *Aufklärung*.” These were tumultuous times, when Brendel was being educated at home by her father to become a good wife and mother, while simultaneously receiving an outstanding education “prevailing in philosophical, ideological and literary views of the time,” not excluding training in various languages. It was already becoming quite clear how the contradicting influences were shaping her young mind. The time Brendel was born into was very unusual. Both, her Jewish traditions and progressive kind of thinking, were competing in young Brendel’s deliberations, and were in continuous conflict. It was in fact Wilhelm von Humboldt, a Prussian philosopher and the future founder of the Humboldt University of Berlin, who believed that, “in terms of character, she was the most outstanding woman in the Berlin of her time.” He said that although she was “considered unattractive by her contemporaries with her dark hair, brown eyes, and oriental appearance, Brendel made

up for it in terms of her personality.” This was a time when women were solely judged for their beauty and homemaking skills. It made the following decision by her father Moses Mendelssohn, who himself was caught between these conflicting ideas of Romanticism and Enlightenment, even that much harder to understand for young Brendel (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel*).

Quite contrary to his progressive teachings, Moses Mendelssohn all but forced nineteen-year old Brendel to marry the ten years older Simon Veit, a Jewish banker “who was her intellectual inferior.” Moses Mendelssohn arranged the marriage between his daughter and Simon Veit after the Jewish banker attended several of the Mendelssohn house intellectual discussions (Frank 29-30). Father Moses Mendelssohn was convinced that love would enter the marriage in time and completely neglected his daughter’s wishes and needs. As expected of her in those times, Brendel did not outwardly rebel or resist her father’s decision. Together, Brendel and Simon had four sons, two of them survived childhood, but love never entered their marriage. Incidentally, both of the remaining sons would later change their names to Christian names (Nehring, Nachwort in Schlegel’s *Florentin*, Reclam 288-289). Brendel hid her unhappiness in her marriage for ten years, but it was evident to many of her friends, as seen in the letter between her friend Caroline and her husband Wilhelm von Humboldt. Caroline von Dacheröden writes, „Die Weiber tun mir weh. Brendel vor allem, ihr Unglück, ihre verworrene Lage bewegt mir die innerste Seele. O Wilhelm, sei ihr alles, was Du kannst, sieh sie so viel Du kannst -lass es dein glückliches Mädchen dir sagen, einsame Liebe bei einem Wesen, dass alles mit solcher Heftigkeit ergreift wie Brendel, ist schrecklich“ (Frank 46). To broadly summarize these lines, Brendel’s friend

Caroline writes to her husband about the unhappiness, despair, and loneliness in Brendel's life, and begs her husband Wilhelm to look after her as much as possible. Brendel's friend Rahel Levin says of Brendel that she is „*ein Mensch*“, a complete person, but does not characterize her as hard and set in her ways, as others had done. She praises her long-time friend's gifted thinking and actions, and reminisces about their mutual love of music, opera, and concerts (Frank 48). Throughout all of their married years, Simon Veit did not know about Brendel's deep unhappiness. Henriette Hertz writes that Simon and Brendel's marriage seemed so happy and peaceful seen from the outside, but nobody could see Brendel's deep torment and unhappiness. Hertz recalls Simon having “no inkling of the inner dissatisfaction his wife was feeling” (Daub 151). To further show how common these unequal marriages were at the time, Brendel's friend Henriette Hertz tells her about her own inferior status as a woman in her own marriage to Marcus Hertz when she writes „Marcus behandelte mich meistens wie ein Kind, was ich denn auch war, doch verdroß es mich, wenn man mich so nannte” (Frank 30). Henriette Hertz complained about the treatment she received from her husband Marcus, especially when he treated her as a child which she herself admitted to still be. Even Immanuel Kant, in 1797, defined marriage in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Metaphysik der Sitten) as „die Verbindung zweier Personen verschiedenen Geschlechts zum lebenswierigen Besitz ihrer Geschlechtseigenschaften” (trans. the union of two persons of opposing gender as a life-long possession of each other's sexual properties). Finally in 1794, Brendel courageously changed her name to Dorothea in an effort to free herself from her unhappy life ruled by her husband Simon and her father Moses Mendelssohn. By renaming and re-identifying herself as Dorothea (meaning

Göttergeschen', trans. gift of the Gods) she was taking the first step away from a life centered on the Jewish community. She completely dedicated herself to Friedrich Schlegel, and distanced herself from her identity as the daughter of famed Jewish Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and the wife of the banker Simon Veit (Becker-Cantarino, *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik* 118). It was by no means common that Jews would take on non-Jewish or Christian names. She was beginning to take her destiny into her own hands (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* xii). Dorothea was disgusted by *Sklaverei*, the slavery she endured as a woman in her marriage, and was yearning to be emancipated and free. She spoke of *einer inneren Notwendigkeit*, trans. an inner necessity, of freedom and yearning for *Menschen* (Becker-Cantarino, *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik* 119). Dorothea was beginning to establish herself as her own person with her own ideas and beliefs, and it becomes quite clear that she was rebelling against her status as a traditional woman. She was rejecting the limitations that Enlightenment still placed on the social status of women in particular. Dorothea was ready to embrace true individuality and courage by defying socially prescribed roles of gender, and openly and fiercely rebelling against the norms set by society. Dorothea's relationship with Friedrich Schlegel was truly progressive at that point in time; living with a man without any plans of an impending marriage was simply scandalous. She enjoyed a *Liebesreligion* (love religion) with total commitment to each other, becoming one (Frank 64-69).

4. Religion and salon life in 18th century Germany

Between 1790 and 1806, Katja Garloff claims, there existed informal gatherings of women of both Jewish and Christian background. At this time, Jews were still on the

outside of society as a whole, but this crossing of lines and thereby mixing of religions became the new neutral zone of the time in society (45). Garloff further writes “that at no moment, then, would one expect a greater confluence of the discourse of love and debates around Jewish acculturation than during the short-lived era of the Berlin salons. But this is not exactly what happened. To be sure, the Christian-Jewish love affairs that often began in the salons found their way into literature, which at the time was instrumental in disseminating the new love ideal we still call Romantic” (47). The more relaxed meetings between the two different religious groups first started in the areas around Berlin, specifically Weimar and Breslau, precisely where many forward thinking artists, writers or musical talents, often called multi-talents, lived. It was, however, by no means a breakthrough to do away with these new found ideas; quite the contrary, as Garloff further explains, “The egalitarian encounter between people from different classes and religions was very short-lived and perhaps, always more of an aspiration than a reality “(46). Brendel Mendelssohn Veit and Friedrich Schlegel first met at precisely such a salon. These salon gatherings, hosted by her friends Henriette Hertz and Rahel Levin, were an escape from Brendel’s boring and confined home, and offered a life of open-mindedness and intellectual discussions. The salon meetings introduced Brendel to the new ideas of the German Romantic movement (Nehring 289). When Brendel changed her name during this time to Dorothea, she already showed her complete dedication to Friedrich Schlegel, and it is another testament to the impact that her new circles of intellectuals had on her life (Becker-Cantarino, *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik* 118). Friedrich Schlegel, seven years younger than Dorothea, looked for a woman just like her in his searches for a perfect wife. He desired someone who loved

the arts the same way he did, and he immediately fell in love with her (Frank 53-54). With this he meant “someone who possessed a certain approach to life characterized by poetry (*Poesie*), i.e. a certain kind of feeling or intuition manifest in creative imagination” (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* xiii). Dorothea was exactly that woman from the moment he met her. Friedrich dedicated his work *Über die Philosophie* to Dorothea, and in his writings he made clear that a person is more than a sexually defined being, and that individuality is of highest importance. In a letter to Henriette Hertz, Friedrich writes about *Humanitätsreligion*, which was getting rid of gender inequality and adherence to social class, not only to benefit Schlegel but all women in society, and it was with this idea, that he was breaking the barriers between the two genders (Becker-Cantarino *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik* 118-119). Friedrich Schlegel and Dorothea Veit who she was still married to Simon Veit at this time were part of the founding members of the new literary movement called *Frühromantik* or Early German Romanticism. The notion of *Vernunft* (trans. reason) in literature stemming from the Enlightenment period was now replaced by the romantic notion of creative poetry. For the *Frühromantiker*, the idea of God and religion as a whole, took on a new meaning. Instead of a finite nature, created by God, the world now assumed its own course, and nature could change from within. God stood on the outside watching nature evolve in some mystery, instead of having set up a rigid set of rules coming from within nature (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* xv).

In *Mixed Feelings*, historian Deborah Hertz speaks of the intermarriages of a number of salon women as “heroic protest against a strict system of arranged marriage” (Garloff 46). After the death of Moses Mendelssohn in 1786, the rise of Romantic love

came to the forefront, the author Katja Garloff writes. She claims that “in the absence of attractive alternatives within Judaism, Berlin Jews who were eager to join the modern age began to consider more radical departures from tradition and to ignore the social taboos against conversion and intermarriage” (47). The love affair between Friedrich Schlegel and Dorothea Veit still married to Simon Veit at this time, originated in one of those salons and is a perfect example of such a union. The pair met in the summer of 1797 through a mutual friend, philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher. Dorothea and Friedrich immediately fell in love. He was drawn to the breadth of feelings and emotions Dorothea displayed, her education, and love for music and literature. She proved to be an intellectual equal to him (Frank 54). This affair broke many unspoken rules and quickly caused a scandal in society and proved to be a major problem for Dorothea for quite some time.

Having separated and leading different lives, Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit and her husband Simon Veit were eventually granted a “rabbinical divorce” in 1799. This divorce signified the first inner peace Dorothea enjoyed in a very long time, even though many friends and family members did not respect her decision, and abandoned her (Frank 61). In her article, Deborah Hertz talks about the losses in Dorothea’s life after the divorce from Simon, writing that ” She lost her right to live in Berlin, she lost intimacy with her siblings, and her relationship with her mother ended altogether” (Hertz 2). During this time, Dorothea supplemented Friedrich’s meager income from his literary publications. After her divorce from her Jewish husband Simon Veit, Dorothea underwent great changes which at first brought her some feelings of liberation, but concurrently “the post-divorce period led to struggles for recognition” (Garloff 62). In

connection to Friedrich Schlegel, Dorothea was called an *Anhängsel* (trans. appendage), and was often viewed negatively due to her complete devotion of love to him, and her intellectual capabilities were often overlooked (Frank 9). Dorothea, longing to be emancipated, still showed great submissiveness to Friedrich, her future husband. Dorothea and Friedrich's eventual marriage required conversion to the Christian faith, demanded by Friedrich Schlegel, which ultimately made the whole ceremony meaningless and empty to them both. She was no longer fully immersed in her Jewish life style but at the same time not yet accepted by her Christian friends (Garloff 63). To add to her struggles, Dorothea Schlegel did not have a harmonious relationship with Friedrich's brother and sister-in-law, and this was the cause of bitter rivalry between the two women (Frank 78-110). As La Roche before her, Dorothea supported her husband in times of financial stress. She worked on translations and other writing projects to help the family, so that her husband Friedrich could concentrate on his writings (Nehring 203). In the midst of her circle of remaining friends loyal to her, Dorothea set out to fulfill her own long-held desire to become a writer, thus the birth of her novel *Florentin*. The character of her male protagonist Florentin in the novel started out "entitled Arthur, then Lorenzo and finally Florentin" (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* xxx). The novel was written to fit the ideas of *Frühromantik* (Early Romanticism), including dialogues, songs, and poetry within the framework of the novel. It was wholly befitting the term "universal poetry", combining poetry and prose, and emphasizing everything poetic (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* xxx).

5. The novel *Florentin*

In summary, the novel *Florentin* is based on the main figure Florentin, a young Italian traveler drifting aimlessly through life, always searching for his family roots. One day, travelling through the woods, Florentin encounters a rich nobleman and saves him from the attack of a wild boar on his estate. To show the family's gratitude, Florentin is invited to stay at the estate of the noble family where he meets the nobleman's wife, Countess Eleonore and also Juliane, the daughter of the Count and Countess. Florentin befriends the daughter and her fiancé Eduard, and enjoys their company while hunting and exploring the estate woods. Juliane accompanies the men, dressed as a hunter herself in order to blend into the woods, and looking just like any of the commoners around them, she claims. During one of their adventures, Florentin succumbs to pressure by Juliane and Eduard to tell of his background, and eventually tells of his sad upbringing, revealing his lack of any traceable family roots. As a young, fatherless child, he spends time in an Italian cloister but escapes with the help of his neighbor, a young man dressed in a military uniform who is living in the area around the cloister. Here we immediately learn of the common threads with La Roche's novel *Lady Sternheim*. The focus is on clothing, such as the military uniform and cross-dressing, hunting outfits or La Roche's masks and costumes, as well as the lack of heritage and the turmoil surrounding religious affiliation. Their mother forces Florentin's sister Felicita to become a nun, but not after being told that she is not his real sister, and the mother not the biological mother. Here we can also quickly relate to the ambiguous family relationships of La Roche's Lord Seymour and his half-brother Lord Rich, which tell of an uncommon family heritage and background. This all adds to Florentin's sense of loneliness and confusion. After a failed attempt to rescue his sister from monastery

life, Florentin flees the area and experiences the tumultuous life of a vagabond, gambling, womanizing, and running into the law. During this time, Florentin marries and expects a child with his wife, a painter's model. Florentin looks forward to finally having a child and becoming a father himself, but his wife secretly aborts the child. This abortion is triggered by the fear of his wife losing her beautiful looks during pregnancy and childbirth, and therefore robs Florentin of his chance of establishing his own family. In his rage he tries to kill her, but she manages to get away and save herself. Her new husband, a high ranking clergyman, expels Florentin from the city. Right away, Florentin intends to go to America to fight for the independence of the new United States but once again loses sight of his goals. During his aimless travels through the countryside, he meets the Count in the woods of his estate and saves his life. As they are exchanging stories, Florentin, Juliane and Eduard seek shelter from a thunder storm, and Juliane tells of a 'ghost story' about a child that she heard about in connection with her Aunt Clementina. At this point we learn of a possible secret connection of Florentin to the family of the Count. As Juliane and Eduard's wedding day draws near, Clementina (sister to the Count) excuses herself from attending the event. The next day Florentin delivers a letter from Eleonore to Clementina but does not see her, as Clementina's daughter Betty tells him, she claims to be ill. Florentin goes on a long walk through Clementina's estate with her confidante, the Doctor, and in the process Florian sees a casket of a small boy next to the portrait of Clementina as Saint Cecilia at Clementina's temple. When Florentin sees Clementina, their eyes meet, and Clementina faints. While the other attendants seek help for Clementina, Florentin vanishes never to be seen again (Schlegel, Florentin-A Novel). The story ends at this point with the

promise of a second part of the novel, which never follows. This second part was to explain the ending of Florentin's story, but it remained a fragment, typical for many novels of the time. According to the author herself, the ending of the story was „ein befriedigender Schluss“, a satisfying conclusion.

6. Analysis of *Florentin*

As soon as we meet the hero Florentin in the novel, we see the turmoil in his life while searching for family roots. Already on the second page of the novel, we experience the plight and longing of a lonesome Florentin, when he laments “It’s beautiful here in the woods! I would like to stay here...here, here I should stay...Alone...Ah, not alone...with her! My eye has not seen her, but I know her” (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* 2). Florentin is searching for his love, desperately looking for someone who needs him. In the novel, Florentin is described as having no family, roots, ancestry--no heritage whatsoever (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* 6). Even the choice of his name is debatable, as it could be a male or female name during this time period in Europe, which already shows Dorothea’s very modern and progressive thinking regarding gender roles. The ambiguity of the name Florentin is clearly seen when the author writes the following paragraph: „Von Florentin? fragte der Vater. [...], Wenn es durchaus mit meinem Namen nicht genug ist,“ sagte er, „so setzen Sie Baron hinzu, das bezeichnet wenigstens ursprünglich, was ich zu sein wünschte, nämlich ein Mann.“ Florentin asked to be called a Baron (showing his noble roots) if his name was not enough to show that he was a man indeed, preferably a nobleman (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* 40-41 Reclam). His singing voice is described by the character Juliane as a “beautiful, pure, emphatic tenor’s voice,” and from the beginning he shows

us his gentle, almost feminine soul (Schlegel, Florentin-A Novel 11). Florentin speaks of oppression and injustice done to him, just like the injustice and forced marriage done to Dorothea in her youth, when exclaiming, “The only definite thing I can remember from my childhood is the coercion and injustice done to me” (Schlegel, Florentin-A Novel 33). Dorothea Schlegel’s main character Florentin is searching for love the same way she did in her own life. In the story, we experience her own religious doubts when we see Florentin rejecting his destiny of monastery life, and Brendel Mendelssohn breaking the Jewish family traditions, when she leaves the Jewish faith. As it turns out, Dorothea Schlegel will change her religious affiliation several times in her life, and most of the Mendelssohn children, as well as the Schlegel-Veit sons, will also leave their Jewish faith (Feiner 208). Florentin is a torn character, always on the search for romantic love and family belonging. In *Uncivil Unions*, the author Adrian Daub writes about the child, that Florentin’s wife, Clementina, aborts, and recounts how earlier in the story a “Benedictine pater educates him in the name of the mother,” signaling his complete lack of a family background (171-172). Florentin is constantly inventing new family connections, from sister to mother to brother, but in the end none of them deliver the desired family outcome (Daub 172). All the relationships in Florentin’s life are not what they seem to be at first, and leave him unfulfilled and wanting. We meet traditional female characters such as the Countess Eleonore and the emerging emancipated woman Countess Clementina, who decides on her own, without alerting the unsuspecting father, her husband Florentin, when aborting the child. Florentin affectionately calls his wife his “little one,” only to find out a short time later, that “she had freed herself from the condition through artificial means” (Schlegel, Florentin-A

Novel 65). Again, Florentin loses his chance of building a family and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, Juliane, Eleonore's daughter, wants to step out and be rebellious, as shown in her cross-dressing hunting episode (Allingham 1), yet she is still pulled back by fear, and displays traditional feminine traits. Juliane oversteps her boundaries as a woman but quickly regrets her decision. She shows her traditional views when she admits, that she would never participate in such a male oriented adventure again, and stays true to her feminine role cast by society. We can interpret Juliane's character as both, male and female, independent while dependent at other times, similar to Florentin's description given early on in the novel. Juliane's desire for emancipation only comes through for a short time before she confronts her own weaknesses when she faces her boundaries she is still not quite willing to shatter. Here, Dorothea clearly shows her desire to question the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

“In order to redefine and expand the private sphere to be a space in which women can grow and develop, Schlegel uses the very constructions designed to limit women's participation in the public sphere, such as loyalty to one's husband and maternal instincts,” Allingham writes (2). In her view, Dorothea Schlegel does not totally support the feminist ideas here, but does show her untraditional history searching for stability and heritage, just like Florentin. The themes of the novel center around the romantic notions of marriage and love, as well as a hero searching for his identity and place in society, as was common during the Enlightenment period. When describing the rooms of the Count's estate, we learn that it is conservative-minded Countess Eleonore who is in charge of the furnishings in the mansion. She respects the Count's love for the

style of furnishings stemming from the old times, his ancestry, but simultaneously adds pieces of modernity to complete the unusual look, incorporating modernity and inventions. Again, here we notice Dorothea Schlegel being caught between two time periods and two social norms of hierarchy (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* 17). The author explains, “But whoever knows the people who live here will soon find that which harmonizes in these apparent dissimilarities” (Schlegel, *Florentin-A Novel* 17). The mismatched furnishings in their country estate speak not so much of the harmony and love, but rather showcase the instability and imbalance in their lives (Garloff 65). The novel also hints of themes stemming from a time period of travelling aimlessly throughout Europe, most notably Italy. We encounter many feminist attitudes in her story, but it is interesting to note, that Dorothea Schlegel’s name was left off as the writer of the novel, as was still expected by society at the time. According to Deborah Hertz, “Her life story attracted more attention than her work,” and she never signed her own work. The writer also insists that Schlegel was a woman experiencing turmoil and constant change, causing restlessness, unhappiness, and loneliness throughout her life. Yet at the same time she displayed tremendous talents and courage to move forward in her own life, without succumbing to constraints from society, and other outside forces (Hertz 1-5). This calls to mind her chosen protagonist Florentin in the novel who experienced many of the same dilemmas. It was her husband Friedrich Schlegel’s name that appeared as the author of the novel, as was common for a time when women were starting to write, but were not allowed to publish their work or get credit for it. It reminds of the constraints felt by La Roche, when her novel was published under her friend Wieland’s name three decades before. It was more important for Dorothea

Schlegel to supplement her husband Friedrich Schlegel's meager income at the time than being recognized as a female writer. She still saw it as her duty to help Friedrich in establishing his name. It was Dorothea Schlegel, who supported Friedrich and their family financially by selling her works during the time when Friedrich was not supplying income for them. She completely dedicated her life to Friedrich, even if that meant losing custody of her children, societal humiliation or separation from her Mendelssohn roots (Nehring, Nachwort in Schlegel's *Florentin* 302-303). It was often noted that Dorothea Schlegel's career was considered subordinate to that of her husband. All of her works were published by her husband Friedrich Schlegel, and that included her most famous piece *Florentin*. Her other works included critical reviews and essays, translations and many letters which give us a lot of insight into the era of Romanticism. Friedrich was having difficulty writing, something that we would call writer's block today, and this lack of production caused financial hardship for them and a personal setback for Friedrich as a writer. His career was greatly stymied. This situation did not improve even after Dorothea asked their friend, philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, for help (Daub 170). This could show the submissive traits still imprinted on her way of thinking and her often lacking sense of self-worth and confidence. After Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel moved to Paris in 1802, they both converted to Protestantism, and finally officially got married (Nehring 296-297). The second part of the novel remained unfinished while Dorothea aided her husband by earning money for the family. Once more, Dorothea and Friedrich changed their religious status when they attended Catholic mass and finally converted to Catholicism, yet again showing their instability regarding religious affiliation (Nehring 297-299). Both of Schlegel Veit's sons became well-

known painters in Rome where Dorothea Schlegel joined them for some time after Friedrich accepted a position with the Austrian Empire in Vienna. She eventually rejoined him in Austria until his death in 1829 when she moved to Frankfurt to be reunited with her remaining friends until her death in 1839 (Nehring 301).

To sum it up, we can see the clear transformation of traditional Brendel Mendelssohn into a more emancipated and rebellious Dorothea Schlegel. It is through hardship, rejection, and courage in Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit Schlegel's life, that we learn of the sacrifices she made, not only to advance the position of women writers in literature specifically, but also for all women of the future. Her strict upbringing in the Mendelssohn home and a forced first marriage, which ended in divorce, show her constant struggle between achieving autonomy from male domination and emancipated freedom, while still preserving the ideas of romanticism, family harmony, conservative gender roles, pursuit of happiness, and love. Her unwavering love for Friedrich Schlegel transformed her life and caused her great sadness as well as an outsider status as a woman. It was Dorothea Schlegel who was blamed for the destruction of the family union with Simon Veit and the partial abandonment of her sons. She was rejected by family members and friends alike, and sacrificed much to be with her love Friedrich Schlegel. This alone tells me that she was still a traditional woman, as well as longing to achieve autonomy and freedom. She lost the trust and love of many family members and close friends at that time, but eventually gained back both, and achieved peace within her immediate family, long after her father Moses Mendelssohn died (Hertz 3). In a dedication in an obituary to Dorothea Schlegel, her friend Caroline Pichler remembers Dorothea as having the „ausgezeichneten Geist dieser Frau, (...) ihre reichen

Kenntnisse, ihr richtiges Urt(h)eil, ihren angenehmen Umgang und (...) die Güte ihres Herzens“ (Frank 271). Pichler describes Dorothea Schlegel as a strong, yet also soft and pleasant person, possessing vast knowledge and a gentle heart just like the female characters in Dorothea’s novel display both strong and weak characteristics. The women in *Florentin* were in control of “their” estate, though this control was narrow and only refers to their homes and not to the outside world, where the male figures still showed dominance. Dorothea’s beliefs were complex, recognizing her as an emancipated and progressively thinking woman. Yet, in the end, she displayed many traditional values herself, and I believe that she reverted back to seeing women playing more traditional roles in society. She had been drifting between the periods of Enlightenment and Romanticism all of her life due to the influences of family heritage, religion and outside forces. Dorothea took big steps forward in claiming rights and recognition for women, but in the end she could not leave behind her traditional beliefs ingrained by her upbringing. I believe that Dorothea Schlegel was not looking for a new era for women to revolutionize society, but she pointed to the strength and intellect in women and sought equal treatment in society. This cannot really be equalized to feminism in today’s world. The female characters in *Florentin* all displayed contradicting character traits, such as being shy and powerful, authoritative and helpless at the same time, character traits Dorothea herself displayed all throughout her life. Dorothea Schlegel was a woman caught in the crossroads of Enlightenment and Romanticism, and much was due to her unusual upbringing in the Moses Mendelssohn household.

IV. CONCLUSION

There have been a number of women writers in the eighteenth century as well as going forward that have tried to break into the literary field of writers, previously only acceptable to male writers. Female writers were searching for more power and freedom to express themselves in a world of male domination. These women have formed a new type of family, and showed tremendous intellectual ability to successfully function outside the traditional family unit. They set out to leave behind the traditional ideal for women as mothers, housekeepers and helpers of their husbands in order to better their own lives and their social standing in society. Dorothea Schlegel makes this very clear when she chooses to have women to hold all the power on the fictitious estate in her novel *Florentin*, even though Schlegel chooses to relegate this power in her own real life to the father, husband, or fiancées. Education for women and access into the field of writing and publishing were the most important breakthroughs of the time, and both La Roche and Schlegel paved the way for women in these regards. There were other important works of literature that helped women writers to gain attention, such as magazines and journals written for women only.

The *Moralische Wochenzeitschriften* and *Frauenzimmer-Journale* presented the first real opportunities for women readers to get involved with literary and journalistic endeavors. Due to the already mentioned importance of upholding the woman's ideal, it was necessary to portray them as writing out of sheer interest, and as a leisure activity, instead of trying to earn money for the family. This type of magazine, focusing on morals, appeared in Germany starting in the early 18th century and quickly spread. The initial magazines were called „Der Vernünftler“ (the Reasoner) and „Die Discourse der

Mahlern". They mostly addressed women, with the intent to improve their educational skills. The works depicted the first press results for magazines published by men in Germany for the benefit of women readers in society. The commonly accepted position of women in society was never questioned, but the emancipatory friendly tone of the weekly magazines was now clearly recognized. The woman of higher society was to be educated and still remain virtuous. Most of all, the self-thinking woman was publicized. The articles in these weekly magazines were written in a basic and uncomplicated language so that finally all women of even lower educational background could read them. In these articles, recommendations for women were published on how to improve their reading levels. The success of the *Moralische Wochenzeitschriften* was great, and a female reading audience (weibliches Lesepublikum) was now established. The reading woman, for the first time, became common and was no longer an odd appearance. Female subscribers were asked to submit their own articles and contributions, and this is how the advent of women in journalism started in the 18th century. Helga Brandes puts emphasis on the meaning of the *Moralische Wochenschriften* by pointing out how these magazines reduced intolerance towards women writers, and therefore paved the way for further literary and journalistic endeavors. She sees these women as the „Wegbereiter der weiblichen Professionalisierung" (translation mine, paving the way for female professionalism). In the last third of the 18th century, the first magazines were finally published under their own names. Female writers were solely responsible for writing these articles, even though they sometimes included additions from outside sources. In the beginning, the women worked by themselves, but later on they formed projects where several women

worked and collaborated together. Some of the first and most well-known among these women were Marianne Ehrmann and Sophie von La Roche. La Roche worked alone on her magazine, whereas Ehrmann tended to work together with other female writers (Brunold-Knop 1-8).

Dorothea Schlegel, just like Sophie von La Roche a few years before her, saw the significance in gender relationships, as well as the importance of dealing with public and private matters. Many critics of Schlegel did not consider her enough of a feminist, mostly due to her strong allegiance and ‘submissiveness’ to her husband Friedrich Schlegel (Frederiksen and Ambetsbichler 423). Dorothea mostly supported her husband Friedrich in moving the new era of Romantic literature forward while translating French medieval romances and finally writing the novel *Florentin*, even though in the end it remained an unfinished work of literature. To Dorothea Schlegel, love and happiness in her relationship with her husband proved to be the ultimate goal in her life, for which she suffered a great deal. She worked tirelessly to show that women, depicted both as weak and strong in her novel, could now hold the same position as men, and were capable of equal power in family relationships. In the end, Schlegel remained dependent and often appeared submissive to her husband Friedrich, but she valued their marriage and love above all. It is important to note that Dorothea Schlegel’s ideas were more in line with Romanticism, focusing on inner life and feelings, which made it easier for her to accept different religious backgrounds and ideas. During La Roche’s era of Enlightenment, freedom was more restricted, and it was tied to moral truths and rational obligations.

Sophie von La Roche's fictitious female characters in her novel portray a new female model-idyllic, caring, and home-oriented. She succeeded even the highly educated *Gottschedin*, writer Luise Gottsched (1713-1762), in becoming the best known female writer of the time in Germany (Frederiksen and Ambetsbichler 288). La Roche was a prolific writer for over 30 years, and produced novels, travel journals, short stories, epistolary works and a literary journal (Winkle 545). Later on, La Roche's work was often overlooked or seen as negligent by the great literary men of Weimar in the era of Romanticism. La Roche was almost cast aside in her advanced years as she adhered to her "old-fashioned" school of thought. It was said that she dressed like the „Nachtnebel des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts" (the nightly fog of the 18th century). Her era was on the downturn (Maurer, Michael). La Roche was not remembered much in literary history, and if at all she remained just a footnote. She was more known for having been engaged to Wieland, for her daughter Maximiliane, who was Goethe's love interest at one time, and for her famous grandchildren Clemens and Bettina who attained fame as literary figures themselves (Kontje 582). However, I insist that La Roche showed more *Kopf als Herz* (translation mine, more brain than heart), and she did not become the suffering woman. She endured no melancholy, neuroses, or psychiatric illness from her trauma. Being a truly strong woman, she instead developed into a robust, not self-centered but self-confident personality, showing self-love, self-realization, and education, which she tried to convey in her „Frauenzimmerbriefe" (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe zu Büchern* 225). It was La Roche's turn to the *Schöne Literatur* that materialized her dream from her youth, and became a piece of history for women readers in the 18th century. To La Roche, the era of *Empfindsamkeit* was

associated with women's happiness. Happiness seemed like a psychological dowry going into marriage, and it was losing its appeal and its social status by the end of the 18th century. The cruel French Revolution and its wars made the depiction of kindness, benevolence, and compassion seem surreal and untimely. The sentiment of *Empfindsamkeit* was becoming continuously devalued until it totally disappeared during the years of *Sturm und Drang* (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe zu Büchern* 227-228). La Roche was also an interesting example for the development of religious tolerance. She remained a Protestant in a Catholic family and among friends, without getting into quarrels. Consistent with the beliefs during Enlightenment, La Roche's religious affiliation didn't matter due to her high sense of morality and Christian ethics. Dorothea Schlegel, equally displaying a new religious tolerance, endured much harsher repercussions due to the constantly changing religious preferences in her own, as well as her husband's life.

Exhibiting tremendous self-sacrifice and personal sorrow, Sophie von La Roche and Dorothea Veit Schlegel substantially contributed to the advancement of rights for women writers of the eighteenth century, and furthermore continued to push for greater freedom in the lives of women moving into the next centuries. Early on, La Roche realized the importance of books in education as an equalizing instrument for imparting knowledge to women in the eighteenth century (Becker-Cantarino, *Meine Liebe zu Büchern* 229). Even though their often heroic efforts did not always make a positive impact on their own lives, these selfless and courageous acts greatly advanced the rights and liberties of future women as a whole.

To summarize, just like La Roche, Dorothea Schlegel was a very industrious writer, editor, translator and reviewer in the 18th century, and an important female member of the literary circles in Germany during Early Romanticism. Neither La Roche nor Schlegel was ever named as the actual author of their well-known novels, and had their own works published by husbands or family friends. Both have made enormous advances for women writers in the 18th century, while exemplifying their progressive thinking during their upbringing, as well as their difficult adult lives. Displaying immense courage, they overcame gender inequalities, fought religious intolerance, and were shunned by society at times. Schlegel attracted more attention through her unusual life story than her literary work, similar to writer Sophie von La Roche. Dorothea Schlegel, distancing herself from the traditional Jewish heritage of the Mendelssohn household, caused problems throughout her life, and was the focus of much family turmoil. However, she was not the only one of the Mendelssohn family leaving the Jewish faith, and eventually reconnected with the family. Through hard work and many opposing viewpoints regarding the social norms of the time, Schlegel often chose the difficult path, and with that she finally helped women in the 18th century to achieve more autonomy. In doing so, however, she paid a high personal price in her life. Schlegel exercised her right for personal freedom while still participating in long-established roles for women. The fact that she freely chose her own path, and often picked a more conventional role, made her an early feminist. It isn't the choices they made in life, but the fact that La Roche as well as Schlegel made their own choices, of their own free will, is the reason why we can call these remarkable women feminists.

La Roche and Schlegel lived around two-hundred and fifty years ago, during the time of Enlightenment and *Empfindsamkeit*. It is important to mention that La Roche and Schlegel never actually met, even though they lived among the same literary circles, and their offspring eventually met in the world of literature. All women everywhere still benefit from their struggles, their amazing courage, and ultimately their advancements to gain more rights for women, as we continue to see the enduring battles for equality between the genders even in the present time. Even though women have come a long way, they still experience male domination in various forms in many parts of the world.

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